

# In the name of God, for the rights of man or in want of potatoes?



*An examination into the reasons and motivations behind the continued radicalization of the peasant population in Ireland following the Catholic Relief Act of 1793*

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# Chapter 1

## Topic and research question

Which were the reasons and motivations behind the continued radicalization of the peasant populace in Ireland following the Catholic relief-act of 1793? This question will be examined by looking at three newspapers in the period from 1793-96. In addition, I will look at the newspapers themselves and examine the way the radicalization is presented in them, and consider whether this representation is a good basis for answering the research question and what the sources can tell us of the nature of the public debate in Ireland during the period.

## Introduction

In the 1790's, winds of change were sweeping over Europe. Old regimes were toppled and political dissenters and free thinkers rejected established truths about man, society and nationhood.

In Europe, Ireland was in a unique position due to a complex set of circumstances that made the country susceptible to the new, radical ideas of the time. The Penal laws that arose from old conflicts between Catholic and Reformed power created a society where a majority of the population lived under restrictions in relation to property ownership, the vote and the right to worship freely. As the ideas of the Enlightenment spread across Europe, it also caught hold in the learned classes both English and Irish, and the restrictions on the liberties and rights of the Irish Catholics were problematized by many. The Rights of Man by Thomas Paine was a bestseller in its time, and as the century progressed, a relief-movement to repeal the penal-laws grew on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The motivations behind the relief were many-faceted, as the British Empire had conquered huge tracts of Catholic land in America during the Seven Years' War, and was also in need of Catholic manpower in their armies contesting the American revolution. At any rate, the relief-movement gained ground as the century neared its end, and several relief-acts for the increasing liberties of the Irish Catholics were passed. In 1793, a momentous repeal-act was

passed that lifted most of the restrictions on Catholic liberties, and the prevalent feeling was that the last of the penal-laws would be repealed in short order.

However, the repeal of the penal-laws was met with resistance by a vocal and powerful force in Irish politics - the members and representatives of the Protestant Ascendancy. Arguments of a sectarian nature, based on the prevailing tradition for social unrest in Ireland, had created the grounds for the Penal-laws in the first place, and was a major obstacle for those intent on reform.

The repeal was not completed, and a growing radicalization within the Irish society was soon evident. Social unrest of economic, political and religious origin had been a defining feature of eighteenth century Ireland, and culminated in a large scale rebellion in 1798 in which large sections of Irish society took an active part. A prominent feature of the uprisings of the eighteenth century had been that they had originated in rural areas, and that most participants had been peasants. The 1798 rebellion also had many peasants in its ranks, but this was a rebellion based on ideals and rhetoric that must have seemed foreign to the majority of the population.

This thesis aims to examine the seemingly contradictory reality that the 1793 repeal act did not decelerate the radicalization of the peasant populace. In a historical sense, the peasants of the day have not been able to present their case, as they have left little in the form of written sources. This thesis will address this problem by looking at different sources, focus on the agrarian group "The Defenders", and through them and the peasantry in general try to get a understanding of what the motivations and reasons for the peasants' continued radicalization was.

What gave the peasant communities the continued motivation to radicalize in the face of/faced with the ongoing reform processes and burgeoning Enlightenment ideals in both Irish and English government? Was the continuing peasant unrest in the 1790's in Ireland part of the emerging Irish republicanism? Was the unrest a more or less direct result of the sectarian nature of the Penal laws and religious persecution, or are the reasons for radicalization found in Enlightenment ideals of equality and universal emancipation and in the aspiring nationalism amongst the protestant landowners and city-dwellers? Were the peasant communities radicalized on a large scale in spite of the apparent growing leniency of legislation, and in which case, why?



## Existing historical research

At the beginning 1790's Ireland, the country's different communities and pressure groups were, in large parts, hard at work to secure their respective interests. This can probably be said of most of Western Europe at the time, as the American and French revolutions had presented a viable alternative to the way society and governments were organized. As a result of a set of extraordinary circumstances, Ireland and its post-French revolution society had several unique aspects which deserve closer examination<sup>1</sup>.

The rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798, the penal-laws and their enforcement have been prominent topics of historical studies in Ireland. The emergence of modern nationalism during the 19th century fashioned a mythical connection between the country's ancient Gaelic traditions, the "eternal" struggle for freedom from English oppression and the opposition to kingship. These "constructed traditions" were important to the focus and zeal applied by historians to the historical examination of the era.

The decade in question has been examined thoroughly from many different perspectives. My first introduction to the long lines and general history of Ireland was through the book "Modern Ireland" by historian Roy Foster. A Gaeltacht publisher labeled him "revisionist", but his book follows the common sectioning of Irish history in that the Penal-laws and the United Irishmen rebellion are the defining features of eighteenth century Ireland.

More specific studies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are abundant. As far as this thesis go, the research and books of the following researchers are important: In relation to the subject of Penal-laws and their implementation in Ireland the research of Thomas Bartlett, professor at UCD, is much quoted throughout the research literature. In this thesis his book "*The fall and rise of the Irish nation*"<sup>2</sup> is used as a reference as his arguments seems to echo throughout the literature. On the subject of political processes of the century in Ireland and England, James Kelly, professor at St. Patrick's College is important and in this thesis his book "*Prelude to Union*" and "*Irish and English*"<sup>3</sup>, where he is editor, is used. Other authors like Professor Jacqueline

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<sup>1</sup> Canny, Nicolas. "Early Modern Ireland". In Foster, Roy (Ed.)(1989), *The Oxford illustrated history of Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 160

<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, Thomas (1992), *The fall and rise of the Irish nation- The Catholic question 1690-1830*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, James (1992), *Prelude to union- Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s*. Cork: Cork University Press & Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press

Hill (Maynooth) and Professor Stephen Conway (UCL) are among the names that keep turning up and Conway's book "*The British Isles and the American war of Independence*"<sup>4</sup> is central to my understanding of some political aspects of Catholic relief. On the subject of the United Irishmen the list of works is long and contains many contributors, several of whom already mentioned, but this thesis also rely on "*The United Irishmen- republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*"<sup>5</sup> edited by David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan. On the subject of the Catholic Church during the period the works of Professor Patrick J. Corish is central and especially his and John Brady's book "*The Church under the Penal Code*"<sup>6</sup>. Historical statistics and economic history are well covered by Ó Gráda and Vaughan<sup>7</sup>. Brian Inglis (1916-93) has written an important book on the Irish press and its liberties during the era called "*The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*"<sup>8</sup>.

## Method and methodological problems

As this thesis seeks to examine the reasons and motivations behind the radicalization of the peasant populace of 18th century Ireland, certain problems quickly arise. The literature mentioned and the available studies are largely focused on other sections of the population. The radicalization and participation of the peasants in the 1798 rebellion are largely explained as a protest against certain economic or political policies, but on the whole, the peasants and the Defenders organization are little examined beyond the pointing out that they were present and were a factor. Perhaps the main reason for the lack studies dealing directly with the peasants and the Defenders is the scarcity of source material, a result of the peasants being a largely illiterate class and the Defenders a largely secret organization. This thesis will try to overcome this problem by tackling the subject matter indirectly by looking at articles from three Irish newspapers spanning from 1793 to 1796.

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<sup>4</sup> Conway, Stephen (2003), *The British isles and the war of American independence*, Oxford: Oxford university press.

<sup>5</sup> Dickson, David, Keogh, Dáire & Whelan, Kevin (Ed.)(1994), *The United Irishmen- Republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*, Dublin: The Lilliput press Ltd.

<sup>6</sup> Brady, John & Corish, Patrick J (1971), *The Church under the Penal Code*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillian Limited

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan, W. E and Fitzpatrick, A.J (Ed.) (1978), *Irish historical statistics- population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy

<sup>8</sup> Inglis, Brian (MCMLIV), *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

Most of the arguments and conclusions regarding the continued radicalization of the peasant communities discussed will be based on secondary literature. There exists an abundance of written records from the 1790's, but since none of them touch directly on the subject matter of this thesis, the use of primary sources was unavoidable. This thesis will use articles from three Dublin-based newspapers published between 1793 and 1796 to provide insights about the realities of the decade. The newspapers are the *Dublin Evening Post*, the *Dublin Journal* and the *Freeman's Journal*. Each had a different political agenda, and together they provide a unique insight into the political landscape of 1790's Ireland and, complemented by secondary literature, a solid basis for inquiry and elucidation of the radicalization of the peasant communities in Ireland at the time. I have chosen to present the newspapers and my examination of them by giving examples of different features of both the editorial profile and the development in Irish society as a whole. By commenting on the excerpts I have chosen as we go along the examination enables me to increase the level of insight into Irish society by gradually broadening the picture of different aspects of it.

The examination of the newspaper articles will classical text analysis where my interpretation of the texts will be based on a presentation and identification of essential aspects of Irish society in the last part of the eighteenth century.

The reason for choosing newspaper articles as opposed to parliamentary records that were also available is the very nature of the press. A newspaper's remit is providing readers with news and encouraging debate. As such, keeping its inherent shortcomings as an academic source in mind, a newspaper can arguably provide a broader understanding of the time in question than parliamentary debate, which is more specific in nature. The parliamentary debates deemed relevant by editors will be reported on, but an article on unrest in a village or an advertisement for a newly invented soap will not be part of a parliamentary debate. This thesis aims to comment on the mentalities of the peasant communities and the reasons for their continued radicalization, and newspapers as a medium are arguably more relevant to the subject matter than the parliamentary records or the records of the courts. Matters deemed to be of public interest would, with some reservations, have been the subject of newspaper articles.

In using newspaper articles as my primary source, I will also implement James Scott's idea of 'hidden' and 'public transcripts'.<sup>9</sup> the idea is that letters and editorial articles in newspapers could communicate more than their apparent content. In a society with a limited freedom of

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<sup>9</sup> Viken, Øystein Idsø, Makt mellom linjene- Makt og allmente i Noreg 1807-14, Master thesis in History, UiO, 2010, p. 9

the press and a watchful state, the idea is that hidden transcripts included in articles can relay secret messages and contain oppositional ideas that would escape governmental censorship, but be recognized by readers that share the authors' sentiments. I will comment on this in my analysis of the newspaper articles and try to answer whether this is a fruitful way of examining them at the end of that chapter.

In order to create a solid basis for an interpretation of the newspaper articles, several aspects of post-revolutionary society must be examined. This thesis identifies three main avenues of inquiry to that end. These avenues are religion and its place in Ireland, the impressions and impact of the Enlightenment on society and government, and the actual conditions of life and the monetary and worldly boundaries that Irish peasants were toiled under.

## Penal laws

In this thesis, the Penal laws and their gradual abolition form much of the basis for the inquiries and the historical questions asked. It is important not only in terms of understanding Irish society in the 1790's, but also by defining 1793 as the starting point of the inquiry through the implementation of the Catholic relief act of 1793, an act that rescinded some of the oppressing statutes which were still in effect through the Penal laws. The subtitle of the thesis, "*An examination into reasons and motivations behind the continued radicalization of the Irish peasant populace following the Catholic relief-act of 1793.*", makes the Penal laws an essential part of the thesis, and they will be a central part in my endeavors to answer my thesis-statement.

First and foremost, the Penal laws were probably the most defining aspect of Irish society in the 18th century.<sup>10</sup> Anti-Catholicism was rampant both in European governments and in reformed countries as a whole, but the Penal laws of Ireland represents the apex of anti-Catholic legislation in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Instituted in 1690, the Penal laws denied the Catholic population of Ireland the owning of property, the vote and the right to bear arms, among other things. This meant that from the start of the 18th century up until about 1760, the amount of land owned by Catholics in Ireland was reduced from 14 percent in 1703 to about 5% in 1776.<sup>12</sup> Historians Bartlett and Foster argue that the Penal laws were not implemented fully at

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<sup>10</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 17

<sup>11</sup> Bartlett (1992), p.1

<sup>12</sup> Bartlett (1992) p. 22

any time in the period between the battle of the Boyne and the emancipation of the Catholics in 1829, but the disjointed nature of the seemingly random, or at the very least localized, interpretation of the Penal laws illustrates the problems of identifying the common denominators in the radicalization that eventually came to the fore in the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798.

In attempting to understand the time in question, it will be elucidating to examine certain aspects of Irish society in relation to the Penal laws. One such aspect is the Catholic Question. The Catholic question and the Land question are linked to the concept of protestant paranoia<sup>13</sup>. This paranoia and the prevalent protestant mentality of fear and uncertainty in relation to the Catholic majority in Ireland are essential. To understand which aspects of the laws created a basis for a broader radicalization, it is important to investigate regional differences in the implementation of the laws. Furthermore, one must take into account Irish peasant culture, religion and mentalities. Did they have a separate mentality from that of the people in Dublin, and if so, from what did such mentalities arise, and what did they consist of? As previously stated, this thesis will try to consider these questions, and an integral part of creating a basis for my inquiries will be to understand several aspects of the Penal laws' impact on the different Irish groups and communities.

## Religion

Concerning religion, several aspects deserve mention.

Both a contemporary and more recent way of explaining Irish society is by equating the peasant communities with the Catholics. The conflation is understandable, since there is a significant overlap between the groups, and since both were affected by the Penal laws, but historically speaking, it is a potentially problematic one. Although this thesis uses the term Catholic in its title, it is important to mention that the term is a problematic one, both in a historiographical sense and as a staple of the peasant communities. The seemingly sectarian nature of the subject matter must be handled with care, so premature conclusions are not drawn. The primary source material and the literature on the time generally apply this term to the majority of Ireland's inhabitants, and this thesis will do the same. This does not mean that the part religion played in the radicalization should be presupposed. The religious aspects of legislation, private practice and anti-papist sentiment should not be overlooked or ignored, but

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<sup>13</sup> Barlett (1992), p. 17-30

should not be exaggerated either. The role of the Catholic Church in Ireland is relevant in relation to the mentalities of the peasant communities, and this role will be studied, but as stated, there are two other aspects that should be studied closely.

The Enlightenment was important, and the influence of the ideas and ideologies of the Enlightenment is evident in such different arenas as the French revolution and the court of Catherine the great. The emerging ideas of equality and the rights of man had such a profound impact on society during the eighteenth century that we today often use the term the Enlightenment to give name to the era. In this thesis the subject of Enlightenment is important to study not only as a philosophical prerequisite for reform in Ireland, but also for its impact on the radicalization of the peasant communities. It is a historical fact that the bourgeois leadership of the United Irishmen movement and many of the leaders of the Catholic committee, an organization of Catholic and liberal gentry working for political reform, was driven in part by the ideals of universal emancipation and equal rights<sup>14</sup>. This thesis will try to find out to what extent these ideals trickled down into the peasant communities and played a part in their radicalization.

## The peasants and their lives

Lastly there is the axis of the living conditions and the day-to-day life as a peasant in 18th century Ireland. This thesis will use historical statistics concerning the peasant communities to try to discern some possible aspects which one can argue were integral in the radicalization of the peasants in Ireland.

I have identified the Defenders-movement as a good representative for the motivations and aspirations of the peasant communities. A semi-secret society in nature mostly consisting of peasants and labeled seditious by both the Irish lieutenant governor and the British government, the movement carries many of the reasons for radicalization that culminates with the large peasant contingents present on the United Irishmen side of the 1798 rebellion. As such, the movement is given a central place in this thesis, and much of the direct study of the peasants' motivations will be based on the Defenders. The Defenders were not all peasants, nor were they all Catholic, and only a small minority could be labeled republicans. But since

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<sup>14</sup> Barlett (1992), p. 19

this movement gives insight into a disenfranchised group with little or no sway on the debates of parliament except through their “seditious acts” and continued radicalization, it seems valid and necessary to see the movement as representative of the peasant communities. The peasant communities as a whole have little voice in the primary source material, and cannot be sufficiently examined through the voices of bourgeois radicals, ardent reform-politicians or anti-Catholic sentiment; the voices most heard in the written sources of the day. Conversely, the Defenders-movement, and the continued unrest of the lower classes are reported on, discussed and thought about.

The motivations and aspirations of the British parliament in passing the relief-act of 1793 and other pieces of legislation are, alongside the debates of the Irish parliament, interesting factors in understanding the society and machinations of the time. Although it does not directly touch upon the subject matter, as explained above, the workings of the governments must nevertheless be mentioned. Thus, the thesis will attempt to highlight the important debates and currents of political thought and activity at the time by looking at the long-standing Irish Parliament, the British Parliament and the office of the Irish lieutenant governor.

In summary: How many people did the radicalized peasant population consist of? What were their living conditions, their day-to-day life, their diet and their working conditions? In the Dublin Evening Post (1793), it is obvious that from the side of the Catholic committee, the normal rhetoric was to refer to the Catholic subject as “the three million”. This thesis should tackle the realities of these “three million”, but as the Catholic committee was a more bourgeois undertaking than part of the peasant mentalities, I would argue that focusing on the members of the committee, the United Irishmen and their respective aims would not provide a satisfactory explanation of the reasons for radicalization among the larger population? In an attempt to better understand the mentalities of the peasants this thesis will study the secret society of the Defenders, their motivations and their way of conducting unrest. By looking at the volumes of three Dublin newspapers in the period 1793-96, the thesis will venture to explore the different facets of and viewpoints on the radicalization of the peasant communities in the public debate, and also try to discern some hints as to how the Defenders thought and acted. As an example of this we have the tithe-unrest by the Rightboys/Whiteboys/Defenders.

## Chapter 2

### The Catholic Question

The Catholic Question is a troublesome term, as it can give associations far beyond what is relevant in a historical paper on the 1790's. The main problem could be said to have historiographical origins. The muddled creation of modern Irish nationalism during the eighteen-hundreds has drawn a picture of an Irish identity as a continuous development from the peopling of the isles. The role of the early christianization and the country celebrating their national day on the feast day of their national saint give clues as to the role of religion in the mentalities of the modern Irish identity. In this chapter, I will present and analyze the history of the Penal laws and their implementation in relation to the issue of peasant radicalization.

As this thesis will explore the mentalities of the 1790s, the Catholic question is not a loosely defined or muddled term in relation to the subject matter. Religion will be examined separately, but in the period between 1760 and 1830, from the first relief-act to enfranchisement of the Catholics, the Catholic Question was understood as “the issue of readmission of Catholics to full civil, religious and political equality in both Britain and Ireland”<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter I will examine the different sides and aspects of the Penal laws in Ireland. First, I will present a short history of the laws and discuss different viewpoints on why the laws came to be, and of the development of Catholic relief throughout the century. This will create a basis for further exploration of the motivations and mentalities of the peasant population and their radicalization. Since this thesis tackles the question of radicalization after the relief-act of 1793, I will also look at the act itself in concluding the chapter. As mentioned before, Thomas Bartlett, Professor of History at University College Dublin, and his book “*the Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation- The Catholic Question 1690-1830*” is quite often quoted by fellow researchers and he also creates a good overview of the research into the implementation of the Penal-laws. As he has gathered so much of earlier research that I deem important to present his book is used to create the aforementioned basis for discussion on the motivations and mentalities of the peasant population and their radicalization.

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<sup>15</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 22



Getting a clear view of the historical role of the Penal laws is complicated by the several opposing ideas and sentiments that existed about the Catholic cause.

As mentioned before; to fully understand the impact of the Catholic question one must look at the origins of the basis of the question, namely the Penal laws. This is obvious as it is these laws that are the reason for the need of Catholic relief. Interestingly, there was a notable difference in opinion between the British government and the protestant population of Ireland in relation to the Catholic question. This aids the understanding of the peasant mentalities by providing insight to the currents of debate relating to issues that directly affected the disenfranchised class of Catholic farmers in Ireland. To further complicate the picture, other Irish dissenter groups, like the Presbyterians and the Quakers, were also subject to the oppressing laws of the Penal code to varying degrees.

In relation to the Catholic question it is also important to mention the Protestant Ascendancy, the label on the period of Irish history that spans from the institution of the Penal laws until at least the Catholic emancipation of 1829. In short, the Ascendancy was the dominion of a small class of Protestant landowners, clergy and the Anglican church of Ireland. Since voting rights were determined by wealth, and this group was the only one rich enough to qualify, they were a powerful influence on Irish policies from both Ireland and London. As we shall see, the landed class of Ireland did have quarrels and took issue with many policies suggested from the British side. It is important to remember that the instigators of the rebellion of 1798 were largely protestant, but on the whole, the Ascendancy was supported by the English government. Considering this fact, the protestant mentalities regarding the Catholic question should be explored.

## Historical origins and the Penal laws

The historical origins for the Penal laws are seemingly quite clear-cut. The direct threat against English rule in Ireland vanished with the defeat of Gaelic power in the “Flight of the Earls” in 1609. Religious tension rose during the seventeenth century in the England and Ireland with events such as the Cromwellian penal expedition, the Gunpowder plot, the Glorious revolution and finally the Williamite war. The Battle of the Boyne, where William of Orange defeated the forces of James II in 1690 marked the end of the “Old-English” power. One of the most important Penal-laws was the law denying Catholics to join the army or procure firearms. This was repealed by the Militia act in 1793. The Catholics were barred

from holding public office and voting, and when they died the eldest heir could gain access to the entirety of his father's estate by converting to Protestantism. In relation to the subject matter of this thesis it is also interesting to note that priests had to register under the registry act, and that no Catholics were allowed to teach children.

Thomas Bartlett is adamant about the importance of what he calls "the protestant paranoia"<sup>16</sup> He argues that the rebellion of 1641, in which the plantations of Ulster were almost overrun by Catholic rebels, gave rise to a siege mentality in which the majority of the island's inhabitants was to be feared and kept in check to avoid the seemingly real threat of extinction of protestant power in Ireland. He further argues that a lingering resentment to English rule in Ireland, protestant social unrest in relation to the "money bill" case in 1756 and heightened ambitions among different political groups in Ireland of increased autonomy for Ireland, created another facet of an independent protestant community, at once dependent on and resenting the power of London.<sup>17</sup> This created a strong opposition, both in Ireland and England, to forces that wanted to emancipate the Catholics and repeal all of the Penal laws. Besides, up until the death of "the old Stuart", effectively ending the Jacobite threat in 1759, the Holy See continued to appoint Irish bishops through the Stuarts. After 1759, however, Rome did not support Catholic political power in Ireland in the same way, if at all. Additionally, there was the French revolution, and the resulting fear in England of a war with France. The revolutionary wars were soon to become a reality and the concept of "the French scare"<sup>18</sup> were very much present in the minds of the Irish bourgeois. As the exploration of the newspapers will show, the French revolution was a very important part of contemporary consciousness. The newspapers were filled with long excerpts of various trials, speeches and articles in relation to the revolution and its leaders.

How can the understanding of the Penal laws have changed so drastically through the years? Was R.E. Burns right when he wrote in the 1950's that the Penal laws were "one of the most persistent legislative efforts ever undertaken to change a people"<sup>19</sup>? The varying interpretations of the effects of the Penal laws probably stems from the complexity of Irish

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<sup>16</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 18

<sup>17</sup> Foster, Roy, F (1989) *Modern Ireland 1600-1927*, London: Penguin Books. p 211

<sup>18</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 114

<sup>19</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 19

and British politics at the time. We can gauge the merits of historical implementation by taking a closer look at the implementation of the law.

## Implementation of the Penal laws

The Penal laws had the capacity to ruin the Catholic Church in Ireland within a couple of generations.<sup>20</sup> The statutes and limitations on the Church itself, and on its members, should have been sufficient to ensure the emergence and eventual supremacy of the Church of Ireland. So why did this not happen? The answer can be found in the lack of arduous implementation of the laws. Bartlett mentions the protestant Ascendancy and its lack of motivation to “spread the gospel,” as it were, being as the privileges of the Ascendancy were offered to all men of fortune and correct faith.<sup>21</sup>

The “sacramental test”, which demanded that people had to perform the rites of the sacrament according to Anglican beliefs to be admissible to hold office, is one blatant example of legislation meant to secure the rights of the protestant Ascendancy, not only against the Catholics, but also against religious dissenters in the north of the country. Bartlett mentions the historian William E. Lecky (1838-1903) and his view that the Penal laws’ implementation shows that the governing ideals behind the legislation were not to destroy the Catholic Church, but to secure and enhance the power of the protestant Ascendancy.<sup>22</sup> Lecky comes to this conclusion based on the fact that the Catholic Church did not go into decline during the 18th century in Ireland, and the aforementioned fact that Catholic landholdings decreased from around 14 percent to 5 percent between 1703 and 1776.<sup>23</sup> This does not include the Catholics owning leases to property<sup>24</sup>, but is nevertheless more than a matter of statistical interpretation.

The reason behind the decline in Catholic ownership of land can to some extent be attributed to the landed class’ willingness to convert to the Protestant faith. This pragmatical approach to religion as a political tool does not appear to constitute a problem for the converts in relations to their Catholic tenants<sup>25</sup>. It also suggests that the sectarian divide as a reason for unrest and radicalization does not seem to be applicable in this situation, at least.

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<sup>20</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 21

<sup>21</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 21

<sup>22</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 18

<sup>23</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 22

<sup>24</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 22

<sup>25</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 23

Roy Foster criticizes the idea of “a hidden Ireland” and Daniel Crockery’s notion that the “Irish Ireland” was a peasant nation.<sup>26</sup> This is interesting in relation to the Catholic question because of the implications Foster talks about regarding a continuous and wealthy Catholic middle class. Even at the height of the Penal laws, Catholics acquired riches as money lenders and such, and this knowledge makes it difficult to maintain the view of a totally oppressed class living their lives segregated from the rest of society.

In relation to the Catholic Question, the relative independence enjoyed by the Catholic Church in Ireland from the 1750’s onward is worth mentioning.<sup>27</sup>

Bartlett talks about the British Government’s failure to implement the Registry Act, an act under the Penal laws that states that all Catholic clergy in Ireland should be registered. He also talks about the Viscount Limerick in the 1750’s, James Hamilton, who noted the causality between “Jacobism and Popery”<sup>28</sup>. Hamilton’s answer was to integrate the Catholic clergy into the public and legal domain in an attempt to lessen the perceived links between Catholic France and Catholic Ireland. Hamilton’s suggested bills failed in parliament in the 50ies, and indeed “galvanized the Catholics into action”<sup>29</sup>, but his thoughts and actions serve to explain an important part of the Catholic Question, namely the complexity and number of motivations in existence both for the forceful implementation of the Penal laws, and the ideas of repealing them.

The Penal laws were, as previously stated, the most glaring example of sectarian legislation in Western Europe. However, their objective is difficult to discern with any certainty.

Bartlett presents the view put forward by Richard Mant, who writes that the laws are not instituted in a “spirit of persecution or intolerance”, but rather statutes protective of the Protestants”.<sup>30</sup> He continues to mention R.H. Murray, who in the 1930’s also claimed that the Penal laws “were inspired not so much by theological antipathies as by fear of the political influence of the papacy”<sup>31</sup>. A different viewpoint is found by Bartlett in the writings of the Catholic priest W.P. Burke, who quotes Edmund Burke:

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<sup>26</sup> Foster(1989), p. 167

<sup>27</sup> Brady/Corish (1971), p. 58

<sup>28</sup> Bartlett(1992), p. 55

<sup>29</sup> Bartlett(1992), p. 56

<sup>30</sup> Bartlett(1992), p. 18

<sup>31</sup> Bartlett(1992), p. 18

“The penal code.....was manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people whom the victors delighted to trample upon and were not at all afraid to provoke... They were not the effect of their fears but of their security”.<sup>32</sup>

Bartlett presents another claim by W.E. Lecky, who claims that “the penal laws went far beyond the requirements of legitimate self-defense”, and that they “were inspired by rapacity, a desire on the part of Protestants to make them (Catholics) poor and keep them poor, to crush in them every germ of enterprise, to degrade them into a servile caste who could never hope to rise to the level of their oppressors.”<sup>33</sup>

## Relief-acts

If one continues onwards through the eighteenth century, one arrives at the important English Catholic Relief-act of 1778, which was passed “with Irish Catholics in mind”.<sup>34</sup> The reasons for the various relief-acts passed through the century are different in each instance, but it is widely agreed that during the seventies and eighties, the relief-acts were passed due to the need for Catholic manpower in the wars waged by the British Empire<sup>35</sup>.

In the late 1770's, however, focus shifted to the poor state of the Irish economy, and the perceived need for reform as a way of improving it. Stephen Small mentions Arthur Brooke who identified the “jealous Retention of a most grievous System of Penal Laws”<sup>36</sup> as an important hindrance to economic growth. As such, the relief-act of 1778, mainly gave relief in areas relating to the owning and leasing of land for Catholics. The bill did not give Catholics rights of ownership of land outright, as this would create problems regarding voting rights legislation. The Enlightenment had not won through, and the 1778 act should be seen as an attempt to inspire economic growth rather than an idealistic relief effort on behalf of the disenfranchised.<sup>37</sup> Foster argues that the perceived lack of economic growth in Ireland at the time in question is not as uncontroversial as earlier historians like W. E. Lackey seem to conclude. Foster argues that the country's continuous increase in both exports and imports up

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<sup>32</sup> Bartlett(1992), p. 18

<sup>33</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 19

<sup>34</sup> Small, Steven (2002), *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 137

<sup>35</sup> Conway, Stephen (2003), *The British isles and the war of American independence*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 239

<sup>36</sup> Small, Steven (2002), *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798*, Oxford: Oxford university press.p. 136

<sup>37</sup> Conway(2003), p. 239-42

until 1790 shows that the economic growth of Ireland gave no cause for alarm.<sup>38</sup> However, this does not discredit the wish for economic development in Ireland, as the landed class and the Protestant Ascendancy would have been more than capable of appreciating the importance of a stronger and more independent Irish economy, both in relation to the republican ideals and the more monetary interests of the landed class. There are several other reasons for the relief-acts, such as the inherent logic in following up policies like the full integration of the Catholics in Québec.<sup>39</sup> There was even the quite precise argument that all of the signatories of the Magna Carta had been Catholics.<sup>40</sup>

In the following two relief acts in 1782, the Catholics were granted the right to own land as long as the land was not connected to parliamentary representation, but in relation to this thesis it is of more interest to focus on the other areas of relief. The fact of the matter is that both Catholic relief and Protestant Dissenters “were beneficiaries of legislation passed between 1778 and 1782”<sup>41</sup> in the whole of the British Isles, excluding Scotland. Stephen Conway explains this as the British state gradually loosening its ties to the Anglican Church.<sup>42</sup> He goes on to say that the reforms of 1778 and 1782 were just as much a result of war-induced concessions “designed to build national unity and promote the recruiting of the armed forces”.<sup>43</sup> In fact, a large percentage of the British army conscripts and volunteers came from Ireland, and the relief-acts giving Catholics the right to bear arms gave the Army a fresh crop of recruitable soldiers and sailors in their ongoing war efforts.

The revolutionary war in America is crucial in understanding the need for reform regarding the Catholics in the British Isles. According to Conway, however, the issue’s starting point can be traced to the British victory in the Seven Years’ War and the resulting acquisition of large tracts of land with large parts of the population non-protestant.<sup>44</sup> Another motivation behind the perceived need to make larger numbers of Catholics eligible to serve in the empires’ armed forces was the “French scare”, so evident in contemporary debate. The French had threatened to intervene and support the Irish Jacobites in the previous century, and with the French revolution, the fear of foreign forces on Irish ground provided an additional rationale for the ability to mount an effective resistance.

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<sup>38</sup> Foster(1989), p. 170

<sup>39</sup> Conway(2004), p. 240

<sup>40</sup> Bartlett (1992), p. 33

<sup>41</sup> Conway(2003) p- 239

<sup>42</sup> Conway(2003) p. 241

<sup>43</sup> Conway(2003) p. 240

<sup>44</sup> Conway(2003)p. 239

That same fear had precipitated the founding of landed militia throughout the country, and during the 18th century a decentralized militia emerged. By law, the militia could only have Protestant members up until 1793 and only Protestant officers after that.

A decentralized militia had already been in place for many decades, and in the North the volunteer-movement had emerged as a natural meeting point for dissenters and Protestants harboring radical thoughts like declaring their independence of Dublin castle and their free disposition in the defense of their lands<sup>45</sup>.

### The Catholic relief-act of 1793

It seems natural to start the examination of the relief-act of 1793 and the reasons for it by taking a closer look at the act itself. Firstly, the point of perceived loyalty of the Catholics:

Whereas various acts of parliament have been passed, imposing on his Majesty's subjects professing the popish or Roman Catholic religion many restraints and disabilities, to which other subjects of this realm are not liable, and from the peaceful and loyal demeanour of his Majesty's popish or Roman Catholic subjects, it is fit that such restraints and disabilities shall be discontinued<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note that the act was driven through the Irish parliament against fierce opposition by Irish parliamentarians (more on this later), but the prevalent idea of Catholic loyalty and the rise of Enlightenment beliefs created enthusiasm for relief both in Ireland and England, not only as pragmatic politics, but also grounded in the strong humanistic and idealistic ideals of the time.

The main concession afforded Catholics through the act was the right to vote. The electoral franchise was not universal until 1829, and the aforementioned lack of Catholic landownership rendered this part of the act pretty much moot, but it was still a major turning point in Irish legislation. Catholics were also allowed to bear arms (as they had been for some years in England and Quebec). Like the right to vote, this privilege was only extended to those Catholics of considerable fortune, and to the Catholics willing to swear a new oath. At the same time, it engendered a more liberal policy in relation to weapons outside the military.

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<sup>45</sup> Bartlett (1992)p. 150

<sup>46</sup> The Catholic relief-act of 1793

VI. Provided also, that nothing herein contained, shall extend to authorize any papist, or person professing the popish or Roman Catholic religion, to have or keep in his hands or possession any arms ... or to exempt such person from any forfeiture, or penalty inflicted by any act respecting arms, armour, or ammunition, in the hands or possession of any papist, or respecting papists having or keeping such warlike stores, save and except papists, or persons of the popish or Roman Catholic religion seized of a freehold estate of one hundred pounds a year, or possessed of a personal estate of one thousand pounds or upwards, who are hereby authorized to keep arms and ammunition as Protestants now by law may; and also save and except papists or Roman Catholics, possessing a freehold estate of ten pounds yearly value, and less than one hundred pounds, or a personal estate of three hundred, and less than one thousand pounds, who shall have at the session of the peace in the county in which they reside,, taken the oath of allegiance prescribed to be taken by an Act passed in the thirteenth and fourteenth years of his present Majesty's reign, entitled *An Act to enable his Majesty's subjects, of whatever persuasion, to testify their allegiance to him ...*<sup>47</sup>

As Foster and others are keen to point out, the number of Catholics with fortunes big enough to be able to swear the new oath was considerable, but for the peasant population, the imagined relief made little or no difference.

The most important part of the act, considering the beginning resurgence of Catholic power in Ireland, is arguably the part where Catholics are eligible to hold office (not yet as members of parliament) and attend a planned university (Trinity College) without passing the “sacramental test” formerly used as an integral part of the Penal laws to hinder Catholics from holding civil and military offices. The catch of it all was the oath that every Catholic hoping to benefit from the act had to take.

I A.B. do hereby declare, that I do profess the Roman Catholic religion. I A.B. do swear, that I do abjure, condemn, and detest, as unchristian and impious, the principle that it is lawful to murder, destroy, or any ways injure any person whatsoever, for or under the pretence of being a heretic; and I do declare solemnly before God, that I believe, that no act in itself unjust, immoral, or wicked, can ever be justified or excused by or under pretence or colour, that it was done either for the good of the church, or in obedience to any ecclesiastical power whatsoever. I also declare, that it is not an article of the Catholic faith, neither am I thereby required to believe or profess that the pope is infallible, or that I am bound to obey any order in its own nature immoral, though the Pope or any ecclesiastical power should issue or direct such order, but on the contrary, I hold that it would be sinful in me to pay any respect or obedience thereto. I further declare, that I do not believe that any sin whatsoever, committed by me, can be forgiven at the mere will of any Pope, or of my priest, or of any person or persons whatsoever, but that sincere sorrow for past sins, a firm and sincere resolution to avoid future guilt and

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<sup>47</sup> The Catholic relief-act of 1793



to atone to God, are previous and indispensable requisites to establish a well-founded expectation of forgiveness, and that any person who receives absolution without these previous requisites, so far from obtaining thereby any remission of his sins, incurs the additional guilt of violating a sacrament; and I do swear that I will defend to the utmost of my power the settlement and arrangement of property in this country, as established by the laws now in being; I do hereby disclaim, disavow and solemnly abjure any intention to subvert the present church establishment for the purpose of substituting a Catholic establishment in its stead; and I do solemnly swear, that I will not exercise any privilege to which I am or may become entitled, to disturb and weaken the Protestant religion and Protestant government in this kingdom.

So help me God!<sup>48</sup>

Interestingly, the wording of the oath seems to try to alleviate the fears of the Protestant Ascendancy by addressing the classical anti-Catholic fears regarding the loyalty of Catholic subjects. It seems like the act in general, and the oaths in particular, are written in a manner that would secure its passing in the Irish parliament and make it impregnable to the Protestant Ascendancy's opposition to any form of Catholic relief. From this, it can be argued that the relief-act contains traces of pragmatical politics and that the ideological zealousness of parts of the English and Irish electorate, while evident, does not constitute the driving factor behind the Catholic relief of the early nineties. The argument becomes even more convincing when one takes into consideration the radicalization of the Catholic committee and the later radicalization of the United Irishmen movement. It is also interesting that the volunteer-movement, which was mainly protestant, had created an independent body of armed men with unclear loyalties to London and Dublin. The government was treading on thin ice, and the central power was not all that strong, something that eventually facilitated the opportunity for a large scale rebellion in Ireland in 1798.

The relief-act of 1793 was a huge step forward in the struggle for Catholic relief, one which supporters felt would keep the Catholics content for the time being. Sectarian violence in the north, a politicized volunteer-movement and the ever-growing threat of war on the continent soon made the assumption a thing of the past. The British armies needed manpower and Ireland had to be calmed, so that Britain would not appear weak or susceptible to French aggression. Prime Minister Pitt had to garner support for his policies and for the coming war

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<sup>48</sup>The Catholic Relief-act of 1793

in parliament, and Bartlett argues that this made the business of Catholic relief in Ireland quite urgent.<sup>49</sup>

In the months preceding the declaration of war on February 7th 1793, the Home Secretary and soon-to-be Secretary of State for war, Henry Dundas, the prime minister and the lord Lieutenant Westmoreland both proclaimed the urgency of Catholic relief. They did not necessarily feel that a Catholic uprising was at hand, but they felt that the matter of Catholic relief had to be settled quickly, before a prospective war on France could be undertaken/broke out. This led to political pressure and a royal recommendation that gave the Irish parliament little choice but to accept, but not without gaining concessions within areas of trade and the promise of further considerations later in the decade.<sup>50</sup>

The reasons the opposition in the Irish parliament had to oppose Catholic relief differed from group to group and were not always purely ideological, but more of a pragmatical one. One can, however, not undermine what was likely the most important reason for opposition, for when Hobart was challenged with the argument that Catholics would continue to press 'until they were put upon an equal footing with Protestants which in the event would overturn the constitution in church and state, separate us from Great Britain and establish a republic under the protection of France', Hobart coolly replied that the concessions for Catholics were 'so liberal and so extensive that they ought to satisfy every rational man among them.'<sup>51</sup>

The Catholic relief-act of 1793 represents the most extensive relief effort regarding the Catholic subjects of Ireland during the 18th century. The reasons for the act can be explained by pointing at different aspects of the relief effort and the previously mentioned economical, ideological and military origins of the Catholic relief. In 1793, however, the best way of understanding the origins and motivations behind the act can be found in the letter of the act itself. It is quite evident in the wording of the act that it has both military, economic and ideological roots, and as the economic aspects can be said to be more or less indirect (through the more liberal laws concerning landownership), the main part of the act relates to the ability of the government to enhance its perceived security through oaths given by Catholics and the increased legislative leniency towards them.

The main problem facing British and Irish authorities in 1793 was the French revolution. The French revolutionary wars were underway, and with the Irish in a perceived constant state of

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<sup>49</sup> Bartlett(1992) p. 153

<sup>50</sup> Bartlett(1992)p. 157

<sup>51</sup> Bartlett(1992)p. 140

unrest, the challenge facing the government was to incorporate the Catholic masses in the war effort against France and the revolutionary ideologies. It should be remembered that the privileges of the Protestant Ascendancy and the oppressing nature of the Penal laws gave reason to believe that large parts of the population would radicalize further and be susceptible to revolutionary ideals. Bartlett mentions the prevalent thought among Protestants that the volunteer-movement's meetings and the notions of elections and assembly "harked back" to the Jacobite parliament of 1689 rather than the Volunteer-movement's assemblies of the early seventeen eighties.<sup>52</sup> This explains some of the resistance to Catholic relief, but it might also explain why the landed class of Protestant gentry felt it necessary to accept and pass the relief-act. This duality between the conservative and rapacious Ascendancy and its fear of losing power alongside the British need for manpower and peace on the home front can provide a valuable insight into the climate of the time of the relief-act of 1793. An important point generally acknowledged and given support by Edmund Burke was the perceived inherent loyalty and conservatism of the Catholic populace of Ireland. It was argued that the Irish Catholics were at heart loyal, and preferred the feudal system in its evolved form rather than supporting the revolutionary ideals from the continent. The stories of mistreatment of Catholic clergy and parishioners in parts of France at the hands of the revolutionaries gave credence to the belief that the Catholics as a community would be in ardent opposition to the French, should they attempt an invasion. In relation to the subject-matter of this thesis, it would serve to mention that the relief-act evidently failed both to stop radicalization and to inspire loyalty towards the Crown or the constitution, but the relief-acts are still important to understand the complexity of 1790s Ireland. It is evident that the pragmatic and political nature of both the implementation of the Penal laws, the parliamentary debate and the clutter of different aims and ambitions in Irish society in the 18th century make an accurate historical explanation of the continued radicalization of the peasant population troublesome. To get closer to the truth behind the ambitions and motivations of the peasant population, we must look at the realities of "the three million", which means taking a more in-depth look at the lives of the peasant population. To ascertain the veracity of Burke's assumption of Catholic loyalty and tendency towards accepting the status quo, we must look at the Catholic Church in Ireland, its status and its practices.

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<sup>52</sup> Bartlett(1992)p. 111

# Chapter 3

## The Catholic Church in Ireland

During the seventeenth century, the Catholic Church in Ireland underwent huge changes and faced many challenges. At the start of the century the nature of the penal-laws were of such oppressing character that the Catholic Church was forced almost entirely underground. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the implementation of the penal-laws was not nearly complete, but at the start of the century the Catholic Church had difficult working conditions. In this chapter I will comment on different aspects of the Catholic Church in Ireland, explain the development of the Church's working conditions and finally look at the Catholic Church in relation to the peasants, the most numerous group of Catholics in Ireland by far.

John Brady estimates the number of Catholics in 1766 to 1, 6 million as opposed to the 682 000 protestants.<sup>53</sup> To know the exact number of people living in Ireland before the start of the censuses with any exactness is difficult, but Brady's number goes to show the massive majority that lived as Catholics in a country where they were actively discouraged by legislation.

From the battle of the Boyne in 1690 up until the death of James Stuart, 'the old pretender' in 1766, when the Holy See saw fit to legitimize the Hanover family as monarchs of Great Britain, the Penal laws were implemented with greater vigor than later in the century. For the Catholic Church the defining penal-law was the registry act, passed into law in 1703, which meant that all Catholic Clergy and Bishops had to be registered with the authorities to be allowed to stay in the country. The Act of Abjuration of 1709 made the registry act problematic for the Catholic clergy as it required them to reject the legitimacy of the Stuart King.<sup>54</sup> The registry act was never fully implemented as the Church sent many priests to Ireland without being registered. The implementation of the act was to a large degree

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<sup>53</sup> Brady, John & Corish, Patrick J (1971), *The Church under the Penal Code*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Limited, p. 1

<sup>54</sup> Mac Murchaidh, Ciarán, "The Catholic Church, the Irish mission and the Irish language". in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p. 166

dependent on the zealousness of the local magistracy<sup>55</sup> and was, as the century wore on, less and less enforced. The law was still in place though, and the church naturally had to refrain from overt preaching and masses. The main thing is that the organizational structure of the Church had to be kept underground, but remained complete with bishops and priests throughout the country.

The appointments of bishops were a complex matter, and were such that James Stuart nominated them, and the Pope appointed them,<sup>56</sup> up until 1766 when the Church recognized George III and gave him the privilege of nominating the prospective bishops.

Another aspect of the Catholic Church's relations with the peasants was the language. Most peasants spoke only Gaelic thus making it essential to have a clergy fluent in the language. As the training of priests was forbidden in Ireland, and as Catholics were for parts of the century were forbidden to send their children abroad for education, this constituted a major challenge. This was an issue at least as late as 1762 when the Irish students in French seminars were using fake names to protect their families from persecution.<sup>57</sup> These restrictions lessened during the century, but the challenges relating to the education of Irish speaking priests remained.

A problem for the authorities, and interesting for our examination of the peasant radicalization, was the banishment of most of the obligatory Catholic holy days. The celebration of these days, with the celebration of mass, could be seen as an example of the 'silent opposition' talked about by Scott. The fact that all religious activity by Catholics represented a kind of protest and identification with a disenfranchised class could give weight to an argument on the Catholic religion's natural place in peasant radicalization.

From 1750 onwards the restrictions against Catholic worship lessened, and up to 1793 the celebration of mass in public spaces became quite common. The difference between the oppressed Church of the early century, and the restricted but allowed Church of the latter

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<sup>55</sup> Brady, John & Corish, Patrick J (1971), *The Church under the Penal Code*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillian Limited, p. 22

<sup>56</sup> Mac Murchaidh, Ciarán, "The Catholic Church, the Irish mission and the Irish language". in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p. 167

<sup>57</sup> Mac Murchaidh, Ciarán, "The Catholic Church, the Irish mission and the Irish language". in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p. 167

stages of Catholic relief was large. A more public Church working for reform on a political level chose the way of political reform and strongly discouraged violent opposition to the Ascendency. Edmund Burke felt that the Catholics and the Catholic religion were a natural supporter and bulwark against the revolutionary forces of the French revolution, and he and his supporters were important in the work to institute Catholic relief. On an organizational level this opposition to the French revolution was obvious, but the link between Catholic Defenders and the United Irishmen shows that there were other things that counted more than respect for the Bishops and Rome.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the representatives for the Ascendency would not necessarily want to promote the established church with the intention of gathering more members.<sup>58</sup> Conversion was a way to conform, and several families did so as a way of holding on to their property and station. This must entail that the status and holdings of the Protestant gentry only was secure if the Catholics continued to be oppressed by law. This gave the Catholic Church respite in its struggles to continue to uphold an ecclesiastic organization in Ireland. There was also the very real possibility of peasant unrest in instances if the penal-laws were implemented to harshly or thoroughly.<sup>59</sup>

The oppressed and secretive nature of the Catholic Church in Ireland made the ecclesiastic organization dependent on its parishioners. The priests often lived under other names, and often stayed with families in their parish.<sup>60</sup> This was because of the threat of expulsion and the fear of bounty hunters that got paid to find and report priests who were not registered under the registry act. This must have created a close knit community where the hiding of priests and participation in religious acts have to be deemed as an almost political action.

In relation to the peasants the Catholic Church had to thread carefully. Yes, the peasants were overwhelmingly Catholic, but just as they had a tendency to violently oppose the harsh measures of oppression by the Ascendency's representatives, did they also oppose too strict a parish priest or tithes that seemed overly lavish. There were examples of beatings of priests and other actions by the parishioners that are alike to the pattern of resistance to overzealous magistrates and local authorities.<sup>61</sup> The Church and its priests got their income

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<sup>58</sup>Brady, John & Corish, Partick (1971) p.5

<sup>59</sup>Brady, John & Corish, Partick (1971) p.24

<sup>60</sup>Brady, John & Corish, Partick (1971) p.22

<sup>61</sup>Brady, John & Corish, Partick (1971) p. 22

through offerings at mass and holy days, and were dependent on it. This, combined with the necessity for secrecy and the clergy's need of staying underground made several Bishops instruct their clergymen to refrain from denouncing people publicly and refrain from a lavish lifestyle.<sup>62</sup>

The difficult position of the Church might be argued to have opened up for links between the Catholic religion and peasant unrest in a way that it could not control. The Church was concerned with spreading the gospel and educating priests in the Irish language rather than being a political power. The fact that the Church tried to lessen discontent and promote loyalty to the crown, on an official level, makes Rome “innocent” in the unrest per say, but if seen in the light of Hobsbawms ‘invented traditions’s the peasants could quite possibly have used religion as a marker for difference to the Ascendency, and in that manner radicalized with strong notions of religion as a reason for fighting. One of the few things we can say for certain is that with growing relief and increasing liberties for the Church, the Bishops tried to publicly distance themselves from the peasant unrest. The Catholic Committee won the support of the Catholic clergy in their work leading up to the relief-act of 1793, and the Bishops felt the need to publicly distance themselves from the Defenders organization in relation to this work.<sup>63</sup> The historian Dáire Keogh points to the problem that the Church was not in a strong enough position to dictate the behavior of its members, and the continuing presumption on part of the Dublin authorities that they were.<sup>64</sup>

To summarize, the Church had to relate to its parishioners in a way that did not alienate them. With their need for protection and a good relationship with the peasant Catholics the Church did not have the same status of power as in for example Italy, and this made public denunciations and too strong a level of social control difficult to maintain. The Church became more public and less oppressed as the century wore on, and it changed from being an organization trying to subvert English rule (by supporting the Catholic pretender) to supporting the monarchy while seeking avenues of reform through parliamentary and political

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<sup>62</sup> Brady, John & Corish, Partick (1971) p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> Keogh, Dáire, Archbishop Troy, “*the Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism: 1791-93*” in Dickson, David, Keogh, Dáire & Whelan, Kevin (Ed.)(1994), *The United Irishmen- Republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*, Dublin: The Lilliput press ltd, p. 132

<sup>64</sup> Keogh, Dáire, Archbishop Troy, “*the Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism: 1791-93*” in Dickson, David, Keogh, Dáire & Whelan, Kevin (Ed.)(1994), *The United Irishmen- Republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*, Dublin: The Lilliput press ltd, p. 133

means. They had problems with maintaining the Gaelic as a language their priests were fluent in, and this could possibly entail a problem, not only in relation to the spreading of the gospel, but also in the importance of parish priests in the daily lives of their parishioners.



## Chapter 4

### The peasants, the Defenders and their lives.

The examinations of the realities of the peasants during the 1790s are a complex matter. Several seemingly contradicting realities emerge when one examines the sources. Ireland was at heart very heterogeneous, not only in relation to the Catholic masses and the predominantly Protestant gentry, but also in the fact that economy, industry and living standards differed greatly from region to region.

In this chapter I aim to examine and create an image of the realities of the peasant communities of the 1790s and by my findings try to see if there are some identifying factors in the culture and lives of the peasants that can explain the radicalization of the group. To do this I will look at the economy of the peasants, their living conditions, their job opportunities and their family lives. When we have created a basis for further examination of the peasant communities I will look at the cultural features distinguishing the Irish farmer. To do this I will examine the position of the Irish language in the peasant communities, the cultural activities of the peasants and their way of fraternizing with each other.

Finally I will examine the organization of the Defenders. Little is known of this organization as it is predominantly secret in nature, but based on the findings of the peasant realities I will seek to explain and argue for reasons and motivations behind the organization and its actions.

### The economy and life of the Irish peasant during the 1790s

To get a grasp on the lives of the peasants a reasonable place to start is to define the group. As we know, Ireland consisted of a large Catholic majority, and a Protestant minority. Through the “plantations” a class of Protestant and Dissenter farmers and craftsmen had settled part of the north, and made it so that the term “peasants” should contain their realities as well. The Defenders however, was a Gaelic organization and it even had a name in Irish. Cosantoírí, protectors. As such it seems natural, in relation to the subject matter that we focus on the Irish

farmer to get the best chance of finding reasons and motivations for the peasant population through the organization of the Defenders.

A reasonable place to start would be to determine how many Irish peasants there were in Ireland in the 1790. The main problem with giving an exact number is the lack of any census from the era (the first one was held in 1821). The term “the three million” was used by the Catholic committee, and promoters of Catholic relief. This number was presented by Patrick Duigenan as the population in Ireland in 1799.<sup>65</sup> Another estimation by a Beaufort was that the population of Ireland in 1791 was 3, 850 000<sup>66</sup>. The revised population estimates by a historian named Connell, is presented in the book *Irish Historical Statistics- Population 1821-1971*, edited by W.E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick. Connell puts the number of people in Ireland at 4,753 000 by arguing that the 841, 322 estimated households of Ireland had 5, 56 persons in each of them.<sup>67</sup>

Cormac Ó Gráda mentions in his book “Ireland: A new economic history” the historian Thomas Malthus and his principle of population. Malthus felt that the most certain way of determining the happiness of a people was to measure the population. The higher the population, the happier the people.<sup>68</sup> However, he states that the happiness could stem from one generation past, and not tell much about the living conditions and happiness at present. When coupled with the fact that the Irish population was 8,175 124 in 1841<sup>69</sup> - just before the famine when an estimated 20% of the population died or emigrated before 1851 - Ireland should have been a tranquil and happy place. When we in addition to this note that the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were marked by economic progress<sup>70</sup> the notion of peasant radicalization seems farfetched.

Of course, this is not the entire story.

The famine of 1800-01 suggests that the system of food production was vulnerable, and Ó Gráda presents Connell who argues that a reduction in living standards because of the population rise would enhance the birthrate. The reasons behind the economic growth can be

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<sup>65</sup> Vaughan, W. E and Fitzpatrick, A.J (Ed.) (1978), *Irish historical statistics- population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 1

<sup>66</sup> Vaughan, W. E and Fitzpatrick, A.J (Ed.) (1978), *Irish historical statistics- population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 1

<sup>67</sup> Vaughan, W. E and Fitzpatrick, A.J (Ed.) (1978), *Irish historical statistics- population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 2

<sup>68</sup> Ó Gráda, Cormac (1994) *Ireland: A new economic history*, Oxford: Oxford university press.p. 3

<sup>69</sup> Vaughan, W. E and Fitzpatrick, A.J (Ed.) (1978), *Irish historical statistics- population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, p. 3

<sup>70</sup> Foster(1989)p. 168

viewed as having been bolstered by gradual lessening of the English restrictions on Irish trade and the wartime economy that came with both the American Revolution and the revolutionary wars against France, and not necessarily say too much of the economic realities of the peasants.

The tale of the Irish peasant is an ambiguous one and this also becomes clear when trying to understand their economic realities. They were seen as very poor indeed by contemporary observers<sup>71</sup> but that they were poor in monetary terms are something else than having to fight hunger on a daily basis. When speaking of the predominantly Catholic farmers their main sustenance came from potato farming. In more heterogeneous parts of the island, the east and parts of the North, cattle were also important, but this industry was to a large degree in the hands of Protestants and settlers. The easy access to turf for fuel and the nourishment of the potato speak of a surviving peasantry rather than a struggling one. Not that this mean that the life of the farmer was relatively easy. Ó Gráda finds more likeness to the oppressive *mir*-system of Russia than that of the free yeomanry of England when trying to label the Irish system<sup>72</sup>, and peasant unrest was a feature of the Russian realities as well. This system that gave tenants small tracts of land dispersed over a large area would both hinder initiative, increase social stagnation and promote thieving.<sup>73</sup> There are also the direct consequences of the banishment and dispossession of the Irish Catholics by Cromwellian forces when the Catholics were forced to move to the west of the island and sustain themselves on barren soil. “To Hell or Connacht”. This type of farming required the gathering of seaweed to put on the plot designated for farming many times and was both laborious and yielded limited results.

The diet was primarily potatoes for large tracts of the peasant communities, and this seems to have been a healthy diet compared to what other peasants in Europe was eating at the time. From looking at the height of Irish recruits compared to English ones the Irish averaged at 65.7 inches and the English at 64.8.<sup>74</sup> When this is compared to the English agricultural writer Arthur Young’s observation of the Irish poor as clothed “very indifferently” and living in the most miserable looking hovels “that can well be conceived”, coupled with his astonishment of the health and vigor of the humans living in such conditions,<sup>75</sup> we can reasonably conclude

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<sup>71</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p. 15

<sup>72</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p. 34

<sup>73</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p. 34

<sup>74</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p 19

<sup>75</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p 14

that the Irish Catholic peasant of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was poor, but that he had the means by which to survive.

## The Peasant Culture

The culture of the Irish Catholic peasant was formed by things we find again later in history when examining the origins and aspects of modern Irish nationalism. Firstly, they for the most part spoke a different language that had ancient traditions on the Island. The use of Gaelic declined during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and bilingualism was more and more widespread,<sup>76</sup> but a large part of the peasants remained illiterate and it was just as likely that their communication with their landlord would be conducted in Irish as in English. Perhaps the language became a more important identity marker in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for the Irish, but the cultural pride concerning the language in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is clearly related in this verse:

Pure wit and parts eclips'd and disrespect'd,  
Our native tongue most shamefully reject'd;  
A tongue primitive florid and sublime,  
Of nervous force in either prose or rhyme.<sup>77</sup>

The lack of proficiency in English meant that for a large part the peasants were barred from the public sphere<sup>78</sup>. This can be seen as an argument for a strong feeling of alienation and cultural struggle. We have already seen the Catholic Church's difficulties in training priests with a proficient knowledge of Irish, and as the Church was one of the few entities in 18<sup>th</sup> century Ireland that could provide Catholic peasants with rudimentary education, the language suffered. When one combines this with the religion of Catholicism, an oppressed but important part of the Irish peasant's life, a pattern seems to emerge. The Irish peasant was

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<sup>76</sup> Ní Mhunghaile, Lesa, "Bilingualism, print culture in Irish and the public sphere", in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p 218

<sup>77</sup> Ní Mhunghaile, Lesa, "Bilingualism, print culture in Irish and the public sphere", in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p 222

<sup>78</sup> Ní Mhunghaile, Lesa, "Bilingualism, print culture in Irish and the public sphere", in Kelly, James & Murchaidh, Mac (Ed.) (2012). *Irish and English- Essays of the Irish linguistic and cultural frontier, 1600-1900*. Chippenham: Four courts press, p 223

generally poor, had limited options for social advancement because of the Penal-laws and the inherent system of tenant-landlord. This seems to make an argument that the grounds for unrest was in existence and that it would be reasonable to assume that the peasants would use the cultural features that distinguished them from the oppressors; language, religion and economy, as identity markers.

In addition to this the local nature of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century should be commented on. Most Irish farmers lived within 10 to 15 miles from their local market-town<sup>79</sup> and this meant that they had a short way to travel when wanting to engage in social activities outside of their family. The clubs and alehouses of such market-towns are important in Irish society if the mentioning of such institutions in the newspapers we are to examine is to be taken as a clue. This local nature of a peasant's life would mean that local grievances and local issues would be foremost in their consciousness, and that their limited access to the public debate would make them less likely to be swept away by abstract ideologies that were not part of their day to day realities and struggles.

With this in mind the agrarian group of the Defenders should be examined.

## The Defenders

It is difficult to say much with certainty about a secret organization that existed 200 years ago and the secondary sources and earlier examinations of the groups are quite different in their conclusions.

The origins of the Defenders are found in the north, and started out as an interest group pledging allegiance to each other and to the monarchy. In this manner the Defenders fits neatly into a historical context of peasant unrest in Ireland. Peasant radicalization had long traditions in Ireland, and the Whiteboys riots that happened in the 1780ies were a reaction to the tithe the peasants had to pay to the Church of Ireland. In a society where the peasants were oppressed both by law and by condition, it seems natural that they would create a form of organization that could help them secure their rights, such as they were, and protect them from too blatant abuse of power from landlords and local authorities.

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<sup>79</sup> Ó Gráda(1994), p. 20

The reasons for the difficulties one encounter when trying to examine the Defenders are the seemingly many faceted motivations and reasons for their actions. In light of the newspapers that are to be examined some of the problems with labeling the Defenders historically are their implementation in public rhetoric. The usage of peasant unrest to entice loyalist sentiments are evident in the fact that the more loyalist newspapers tend to talk about the group with more regularity. One example of this is the discredited idea that the Catholic Committee had a relationship with the Defenders.<sup>80</sup>

At any rate, the country was in turmoil at the time when the relief act of 1793 was passed. This is evident by the fact of the passing of the Militia bill, instituted in large part to suppress Defender unrest.<sup>81</sup> Another reaction to the Militia bill could have been increasing number of recruits for groups such as the Defenders as there was a fear that the relief act of 1793, that gave Catholics the right to join the army, would be used in combination of the Militia bill too send Irish troops overseas. If true, this trepidation was understandable, as the authorities used press-gangs in areas of peasant unrest to suppress unrest and get sailors for the British navy.<sup>82</sup>

The English feared the link between the United Irishmen and the Defenders<sup>83</sup>, but whether this was a reasonable fear is not clear. The Defenders was labeled as loyal to the monarchy by Edmund Burke, and in Marcus Tanner's book, "The holy wars of Ireland", the defenders are defined as a staunchly conservative, working class and Catholic group.<sup>84</sup> Robert Kee argues that the Defenders had problems with the anti-clergy sentiment of the French revolution<sup>85</sup> and had more in common with earlier groups such as the Whiteboy's in their attempt to address local grievances rather than promoting republican revolution. The Defenders as a group is a challenge to come to grips with, and the problem does not only relate to its semi-secret nature. The historian Kevin Whelan claims that the Defenders were not radical republicans but rather that they felt as representatives for the 'original proprietors' of Ireland. He argues that their goal was not to abolish class, even though they wanted to

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<sup>80</sup> Kee, Robert (1972), *The green flag- A history of Irish nationalism*, London: Penguin books, p. 60

<sup>81</sup> Small, Steven (2002), *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 209

<sup>82</sup> Kee, Robert (1972), *The green flag- A history of Irish nationalism*, London: Penguin books. p. 69

<sup>83</sup> Small, Steven (2002), *Political thought in Ireland 1776-1798*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 212

<sup>84</sup> Tanner, Marcus (2003). *Ireland's Holy Wars-the struggle for a nation's soul 1500-2000*. Reading: Cox and Wyman.Ltd. p. 191

<sup>85</sup> Kee, Robert (1972), *The green flag- A history of Irish nationalism*, London: Penguin books.p. 45

make ‘the cobbler and the Caesar’ level<sup>86</sup>, but rather that they were motivated by an ambition of ‘an imagined community with a common identity’<sup>87</sup> and social change addressing the peasants lot.

As republican clubs became a feature in many rural villages across the country during the 1790’s clubs that were claimed to have a relation to the Defenders also arose,<sup>88</sup> and ‘defenderism’ as a basis for political groups and actions was soon a reality.<sup>89</sup> In the newspapers we will examine there are several incidents concerning the giving of seditious toasts and oaths, and these would have to have been given publicly to reach the ear of the authorities and editors. This could have been a great way of understanding the political and social motivations behind the movement, but as it turns out, the oaths given are not uniform.

Marcus Tanner claims that the Defender oaths demanded loyalty to George III<sup>90</sup>, while later examples of Defender oaths were much more republican and even atheistic in content.

Whether this development is a natural development of the radicalization process is difficult to say, and the discrepancy between the sources when it comes to the radicalization of the Defenders and peasants should be examined further.

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<sup>86</sup> Whelan, Kevin, “The United Irishmen, the Enlightenment and Popular Culture”, in Dickson, David, Keogh, Dáire & Whelan, Kevin (Ed.)(1994), *The United Irishmen- Republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*, Dublin: The Lilliput press ltd, p. 273

<sup>87</sup> Dickson, David, Keogh, Dáire & Whelan, Kevin (Ed.)(1994), *The United Irishmen- Republicanism, radicalism and rebellion*, Dublin: The Lilliput press ltd, p 273

<sup>88</sup> Gillen, Ultán, “Opposition political clubs and societies, 1790-8”, in Kelly, James & Powell, Martyn, J.(Ed.)(2010) *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth- Century Ireland*, Dublin: Four courts press, p. 290

<sup>89</sup> Foster, Roy, “Ascendancy and Union”, in Foster, Roy (Ed.)(1989), *The Oxford illustrated history of Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford university press, p. 180

<sup>90</sup> Tanner(2003) p. 191

## Chapter 5.

### The newspapers

On Wednesday last, about 700 of those misguided people, called defenders, appeared under arms in Dunleer, mostly with firelocks They consisted entirely of the lowest peasantry in the country. What is not their object no one can tell, nor can they explain themselves. To get possession of quantities of fire arms seems, however, to be their first aim. (Extract of a letter from Carrickmacross, Jan 2.)<sup>91</sup>

With this extract from a letter sent to the editor of the Freeman's Journal in 1793 we are clearly introduced to the problems facing one who are to explore the reasons and motivations behind the radicalization of the peasant populace in Ireland between 1793 and 96. Freeman's Journal, being a primarily loyalist newspaper, could give us a hint as to how seriously and truthful the creator of the letter was, but as we now know that the relief-act was being pushed through in the early stages of 1793, against opposition from many Irish parliamentarians the extract could point towards the interest of garnering support for the view that the peasant uprisings and radicalization was a danger to the tranquility of the land, and that relief would only entice them further. It is also worthy of note the mentioning of their primary motivation of gathering arms. One can easily think that, whether a reality or not, the idea of an armed peasant 'horde' as seen in France during the revolution would be something that the gentry of the day would rather not let happen. Primarily however the extract serves as a good reminder of the difficulties facing the student trying to come to grips with the Defenders and their motivations. In this extract they supposedly don't even know why they congregate themselves!

This chapter will be built up by going through the yearly volumes of the three newspapers The Freeman's Journal, The Dublin Evening post and the Dublin Journal year by year in the period 1793-1796. First, the papers and the situation of the press will be discussed, and then different quotes and passages that illuminates certain aspects of the Defenders, the peasants or the general society in Ireland will be presented and commented in an effort to come closer to the answer on why the peasants continued to radicalize and look for motivations and reasons behind this radicalization. The idea of Scott that there are hidden and public transcripts in the press of the period will be commented on, and its merit as a method for looking for reasons

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<sup>91</sup> Freeman's Journal, January 2, 1793



for peasant radicalization in Ireland during the latter stages of the eighteenth century will be discussed. As mentioned previously, the peasants themselves are not represented with a voice in the national press, but based on the tree axis of radicalization presented earlier: the rights of man, social oppression and want and religion, I will try to identify some clues as to what could have motivated the peasant population, and to examine the apparent conflicting views of the reasons and motivations that identifies the Defenders as a radical group.

## The newspapers and the press in Ireland

On the surface the press in Ireland following the regency crisis was quite free when compared to the press in for example Denmark-Norway. This did not mean that it was free in a modern sense as the government had many ways of sanctioning editors that went too far. In the period of 1793-96 the government sentenced or tried many editors for seditious or libelous activity, but their principal method of coercing the newspapers were by direct or indirect subsidies. This created three main types of newspapers published in Dublin; the “castle papers”, the commercial papers and the opposition papers.<sup>92</sup> The press was for the most part localized in the big cities, but some regional papers also existed. If these papers had anything of national interest printed the city newspapers often reprinted articles or letters from them.

The Castle papers were papers that were perceived to be governmental tools in the public debate, and as such suffered when it came to circulation and popularity. They were subsidies by different means, but primarily they received money for printing proclamations from the government. Both the Freeman’s Journal and the Dublin Journal can be labeled as Castle papers in this thesis’ period of examination, 1793-96.

The commercial papers were, as the name implies, dependent on advertisements, and as such had a more populist editorial style. The Dublin Evening post is one such example.<sup>93</sup> These papers had a more neutral political profile in the period leading up to this thesis’ period of examination, but the Dublin Evening Post was politicized by a rivalry between its editor and the editor of the Freeman’s Journal. The editor of the Freeman’s Journal was Mr. Higgins, a prominent citizen of Dublin. He was labeled as a government tool and a fraud<sup>94</sup>, by the Dublin Evening Post and its editor IJDPJED. His paper was not very popular, but had been “bought” by the government because of its earlier circulation. Higgins was not entirely loyal to the

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<sup>92</sup> Inglis, Brian (MCMLIV), *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd. p. 15

<sup>93</sup> Inglis, Brian (MCMLIV), *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd. p. 19

<sup>94</sup> Inglis, Brian (MCMLIV), *The Freedom of the Press in Ireland 1784-1841*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd. p. 22

government, and was seen as a nuisance by Dublin Castle. The Freeman's Journal is, however, a good paper to examine as it would be reasonable to assume that its articles and proclamations and editorial profile are more or less too the liking of Dublin Castle. As such, it can tell us something of what the authorities wanted the public to know. It should however be remembered that its limited circulation makes it problematic to use it as a good indicator on the sentiments of the general public. To better grasp the sentiments of the general public the Dublin Evening Post is a reasonable choice. The strength of the paper is that it continued to maintain a large circulation through the period, but the weakness as a source concerning the peasant radicalization is that the radicalization is markedly less mentioned in the Dublin Evening Post than in the Freeman's Journal and the Dublin Journal. The Dublin Journal was edited by John Giffard and is the most blatantly conservative and bigot newspaper. A castle newspaper on paper, the Dublin Journal is included in my examination as it was widely circulated both by supporters and the opposition of the views presented. The paper is also valuable as a source as it represents very radical views. The editor, Francis Higgins, even coined the phrase "Protestant Ascendancy" and "was one of its most vocal supporters".

### Method of examination

As the newspapers contain extremely much information I have had to limit the scope of my inquiries to what I deem valuable to shed light on the peasant radicalization.

The historian James C. Scott's method of searching for hidden and public transcripts will mostly be applied by the selection of articles, declarations and letters, rather than a close examination of the excerpts themselves. This is necessary as the voice of the peasants is not directly heard in the sources, and we can only try to discern the truth from the indirect source of the newspapers in what they choose to print about the peasants' actions and thoughts. The hidden transcripts of the peasants are as such silent, but the public transcripts in especially the castle newspapers could show us how the peasants were construed. With the added aspect of the commercial The Dublin Evening Post, we will have a broader base on which to interpret the reasons and motivations behind peasant radicalization. The main way of interpreting the sources will be conducted implementing ordinary text analysis where I will use the basis created by the first chapters to interpret the texts in relation to the subject matter.

The examination will be conducted by interpreting articles, letters and declarations in a chronological fashion, by year.

## 1793

From the first of January, 1793, we are met with a typical feature of all three newspapers. The declaration of a group of inhabitants, traders or other interest-groups trying to get their feelings and opinions across to the central authorities. These declarations? do not appear to consist of very radical thoughts or even remotely 'seditious' ideas, but a professing of loyalty and some kind of gentle lobbying. These declarations were often printed in several editions of the papers, and were an often printed alongside a response from the authorities. The declaration from the city of Bandon is reprinted here as an example of something very typical of the source material.

Freeman's Journal 1793, 1.January.

At a meeting of the corporation and principal inhabitants of the town and vicinity of Bandon, held at the Kings arms tavern, pursuant to public notice, on Wednesday 26th December, 1792.

Resolved, that as loyal subjects, firmly attached to his majesty's person and family, zealous friends to our present most happy constitution, grateful for the prosperity enjoyed under it, and determined supporters of the due observance of the laws, we will use every means in our power to suppress all seditious proceedings, whether evicted by inflammatory publications, or offered in personal outrage.

Resolved, that as our only wish in our present meeting, is, to contribute as much as in us lies to the general good an peace of individuals, we think it our duty to express thus publicly, the abhorrence we feel at all attempts made to excite disturbance, or cause disunion.

Resolved, that we are of opinion, that all friends of good order should now stand forward and declare their sentiments, and their determination to support the laws and each other, which must be the effectual means of intimidating those who may harbor any ideas of sedition, and of rendering the blessings of real liberty, enjoyed under the present constitution, as permanent as they have been unexampled.

Resolved, on a motion made by mr. Bernard, that the foregoing resolutions should be transmitted to the provost to the right hon.mr. Hubart, to be laid before his excellency the lord lieutenant.

Sampson Jervoid, provost.<sup>95</sup>

This declaration gives us valuable information on the state of the country in the period leading up to the Catholic relief-act of 1793. For one, the men who submitted this declaration seem adamant in their wish for the central authorities to know of their allegiance as they wish 'all friends of good order' to take a stand against the rising unrest among the peasant population in Bandon and surrounding areas. The signatories are the city's men of consequence, and as such the ones more or less protected by the Penal laws, but some of the signatories might very well have been Catholic merchants or craftsmen. The wording of and the need for this declaration is a clear indication that there was serious unrest. It seems reasonable to assume that these men, who stood to lose much in the event of continued unrest, wished to profess their loyalty with the goal of securing, quite publicly, the support and considerations of Dublin Castle. The repeated mention of the constitution is important. The Irish parliamentary tradition and the constitution gave the Irish a certain degree of autonomy from the British empire, and as such the signatories wish to stress their unwavering support of the constitution could be construed as an argument in favor of the Irish in the ongoing struggle for dominance between London and Dublin. The final point of interest is the mention of 'inflammatory publications'. Pamphlets were an important way of distributing ideas, and printers both nomadic and stationary were crucial to the different Irish interest-groups' efforts to spread their teachings and ideals. The problem with the pamphlets was that many farmers and peasants were illiterate, and the ones who weren't were usually only in possession of basic reading and writing skills. However, considering the severity of the sanctions that the central authorities met these writings and public speeches of 'seditious' character with, the content of said writings seems to have been quite public in nature. You do not need more than one proficient reader in a village to tell the rest of the inhabitants the content of the pamphlets being passed around.

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<sup>95</sup> Freeman's Journal, January 1, 1793

That the Lord Lieutenant and the central administration were concerned about the development is evident from a proclamation issued by the lord Lieutenancy regarding “seditious gatherings”, “Procuring of arms and making of uniforms in the county and city of Dublin”.<sup>96</sup> This can help explain the problematic nature of Irish realities just before the English managed to pass the relief-act. At the very least, it highlights the reality of an increasing radicalization across the board, as this declaration could be coined both for a pressure group for Catholic reform, or, perhaps more likely, the volunteer-movement that was generally strongly opposed to relief and radicalized towards increasing separatist ideals to protect the Irish autonomy.

To further underline the fact that the Defenders-unrest was a fact of 1792/1793 in Ireland, an early January postscript in Freeman's Journal provides an example of what seems to be a typical pattern of Defenders-unrest - according to the Freeman's Journal, at least.

Postscript. Dublin, January, 1.

the accounts from the county of Louth, with respect to the proceedings of a banditti, calling themselves Defenders, grow daily more alarming, near forty houses have been attacked belonging to Protestants, for the purpose of plundering them of their arms, and most of the attacks have been successful.

This banditti is linked together by an oath of secrecy, and they have their regular Leaders and Captains, they train themselves by night, in the practice of fire-arms, or execute plans of robbery.

Lately they have infested the road from Drogheda to Dunleer, where they stop passengers, and rob them of their arms. As, however, a large detachment of forces has lately been sent into that part of the country, and as the Speaker; the Mayor of Drogheda, and other gentlemen of the county of Louth, are exerting themselves, and have to a degree been successful in their discoveries, we hope soon that such disgraceful proceedings may be entirely put an end to.

That the peasant unrest was primarily focused on the gathering of firearms seems likely to be true. The postscript's focus on the Protestants being the ones under attack may say more about

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<sup>96</sup> Freeman's Journal, 1 January 1793

the editorial profile and ideals of the Freeman's Journal than about the realities of the crimes. On the other hand, the city of Drogheda and the county of Louth are close to the border to Ulster, and in the north, the peasant unrest had more of a sectarian tinge than in other areas. Referring to the Defenders/peasants as 'banditti' is the exclusive domain of the Freeman's Journal and the Dublin Journal, as is the focus on the organization and seditious nature of the unrest. This could stem from a wish to create and enhance a siege-mentality among the members of the Ascendancy, but that more or less organized bands of peasants is evident in all of the newspapers. It is, however, important to note the lack of mention of the Defenders as a driving force behind peasant unrest in the Dublin Evening Post during the entirety of the period from 1793-96. The somewhat sarcastic and flamboyant tone of a later postscript in the same paper on the same date arguably strengthens the argument that one should take care when drawing conclusions on the Freeman's Journals' writings: "There never was remembered less street-robberies at the season, than at present. Conceiving that the constitution was against their trade, the free-booters are probably busy in united societies, to obtain its annihilation."<sup>97</sup>

In sarcastic tones the anonymous writer explains the causality between the apparent security of the roads and the increasing growth of societies which in the writers' mind has attracted the attention of the brigands. His choice of words when naming these secret societies "united societies" is undoubtedly meant as a way of explaining the United Irishmen's part in aggravating and enhancing the unrest among the peasant population. This is a falsity, since the United Irishmen mainly sprung out of the Catholic and Protestant lobby in Belfast and Dublin, and that they had not yet radicalized to the point of disregarding the possibility of achieving their goals (mainly Catholic emancipation) through parliamentary reform. The Catholic committee was the chief lobby for this group, and they were on the verge of their biggest victory to date, namely the relief-act of 1793. However, what it does show is the perceived link between radical republicanism and supporters of revolutionary ideals with the peasant unrest. So we are presented with the two irreconcilable views that the radicalization of

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<sup>97</sup> Freeman's Journal postscript 1.January 1793.

the peasants was grounded in sectarian unrest and that it was grounded in republican and radical ideals and it is only January 1.

To conclude the description of Ireland as seen through the papers in 1793, I will take a closer look at a declaration from Westmoreland, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, regarding the shooting of a magistrate in county Louth. The Lord Lieutenant promises a general pardon to the accomplices in the shooting of the magistrate O'Neill and promises anyone, excluding the shooter, the reward of 200 pounds if the shooter is apprehended.<sup>98</sup> The reward is substantial and shows the authorities' interest in solving the crime. The offering of pardons and rewards was a tactic commonly employed by the government to solve such crimes. Bear in mind that magistrates and local authorities were important to secure and maintain control of territories, and that challenging their authority could be more detrimental to central authorities than peasant unrest. This implies that the unrest in the county of Louth was of a relatively serious character. With the aforementioned sending of government troops to the area, this is proof that unrest, in this county, at least, was a reality. The Freeman's Journal's mention of the unrest and their wish to portray it as either sectarian or republican unrest can be interpreted as a wish to increase the opposition to the relief-act, and the failing to mention it at all in the Dublin Evening Post can be seen as the opposite. If we continue onwards and take a look at some excerpts from some debates in the Irish parliament, this duality of opinion becomes even more apparent.

On Wednesday February 27<sup>th</sup> Dr. Duigenan spoke against the relief-act in parliament: "in the course of his speech the doctor had declared that if the protestant interest wars WARS? surrendered to the roman Catholics, as by this bill it would be, an union with England would be the necessary consequence; the protestants would have no refuge but in an union- and rather than be the slave of the roman Catholics, he would himself be the man to propose an

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<sup>98</sup> Freeman's Journal 4. February 1793 (Date of declaration 27.november 1792)

union”.<sup>99</sup> Hobart reassures the doctor by reminding him that only Catholics who own a substantial estate or have large fortunes will/would be able to vote. He also supports the amendment to the continuation by claiming that he has every faith in the Catholic community, as there is no longer need for restrictions. This shows that the side wanting reform does not give credit to the view that the unrest in Louth and elsewhere are signs that the planned relief would constitute a marked lessening of Protestant power in Ireland, or, indeed, that the peasant unrest has anything to do with the Penal laws.

The debate continues with Hobart taking the floor:

the hon. gentleman has stated what was done in king James parliament as an argument against granting roman Catholics the same privileges that they were permitted to retain even after the revolution. - Does he forget, Sir, that that Parliament acted as the parliament of a kingdom separated and disunited from her political connexion with England? If he wishes to shew, that when disunited from England, the parliament of Ireland would act as that of James II. Acted, no one will deny it; we all know that the safety of the protestants of Ireland depends upon our connexion with England; we know that till Ireland has a desperate king the forfeited property can never be re-assumed, the protestant interest can never be overthrown, and therefore we take every measure which can tend to strengthen the connexion with England.

This should be enough to highlight my point as it is clearly stated that the connection with England is what secures the holdings of the Protestant Ascendancy. The problem with this, as we have discussed previously, is the resistance of the Irish parliament, both from reformers like Grattan and advocates for the Ascendancy like Dr. Duigenan, to giving the central authorities’ free reign in dictating Irish policies. The aforementioned Protestant held belief that they are under siege by the Catholic masses goes to show the problems facing the Ascendancy and its supporters. England wants Catholic manpower in both the Irish defense and in the forces of the empire and strongly wishes to see the relief passed. The Protestants of

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<sup>99</sup> Freeman's Journal 27. February 1793



Ireland must have felt caught between a rock and a hard place, as their one perceived road to continued power, England, also wanted reform that would alter the political landscape of Ireland.

The discussion continues centered around the question of whether Protestant freeholders oppress their Catholic tenants by evicting them from their houses and whether or not the existing system is corrupt. The speaker of the house John Foster feels that it is and in these sentiments there are several things that warrant comment.

Firstly, the Enlightenment view that oppression based on religion was not the right of the landowner, and secondly, that the system of the Ascendancy itself was corrupt.

After this the part of the debate concerning the petition of the Catholic committee regarding the emancipation of the Catholics in Ireland is discussed. In response to this the doctor quite forcibly replies:

...The next step was to want an assembly of delegates to be elected in a manner the most obnoxious in this country- that of the French assembly, to pass by parliament. To pass by government, (the natural conveyances of the wishes of the people), and to transmit, by deputies of their own, a petition to his Majesty, as if they would say to his Majesty- «you can put no confidence in your parliament nor in your government of Ireland- we only can tell the wishes of the nation; we only know the constitution.

The argument is clear. When faced with the accusation that the system he advocates is in any way corrupt, he responds by painting a picture of what he views as the only alternative; the usurpation of Irish parliamentary power at the hands of the recently formed United Irishmen, or at the very least the Catholic committee. The humorous aspects of the argument of the parliament being 'the natural conveyances of the wishes of the people' might seem somewhat absurd to modern ears, but it is easy to understand the power of such arguments in an era in which the 'French-scare' was extremely prevalent in public debate and thought. England was on the brink of joining the Revolutionary wars, and the fear of the spreading of revolutionary ideals in Ireland turned out to be a very real threat. Whether the revolutionary thoughts of the United Irishmen had an impact on the ongoing peasant unrest in Ireland is hard to verify, but

that Dr. Duigenan tried to argue that the connection was real and apparent can be viewed as political populism targeting the real fears of large parts of the Irish gentry.

The end of Dr. Duigenan's spirited opposition to the relief-act concerns the Catholic Committees much used term 'the three million', referring to the disenfranchised class of Catholics in Ireland. "...but he would remark, that of these there must be one half females, and it appeared by a late calculation, that there were 2,150,000 unable to pay the state 2s. Per annum. If it was intended to reconcile by this bill, it would not have the effect; it would not satisfy the Roman Catholics, and could but offend the loyal Protestants."<sup>100</sup>

Dr. Duigenan turns the argument used by the opposition in parliament against them. The argument used to alleviate Ascendancy fears about the consequences of Catholic emancipation; the fact that most Catholics would not meet the demands for receiving the vote is countered with the likely argument that the Catholics would not be satisfied by partial relief. In retrospect the argument was sound, as the Catholic side felt that the relief-act was but a stepping stone to receiving full emancipation and civil rights, and that the failure of this relief to materialize promptly contributed to the rapid radicalization of the former advocates for parliamentary reform such as Napper Tandy and Wolfe Tone.

The examination of the papers pre relief-act clearly demonstrates that the main aspects of interest were the relief and the French revolution. We have also seen the effort to link the peasant unrest both to the revolutionary ideals of France and the Catholic religion's argued potential to commit a genocide of Protestants through the Catholic 'hordes'.

## 1794

With the implementation of the relief-act and the militia act, tensions heightened. London's attempt to create a tranquil, docile and loyal Ireland seems to have failed, and peasant unrest continued unabated in rural areas. With the militia bill, the formation of militia, mainly consisting of Protestants, but also some Catholics, like Daniel O'Connell, gathers pace. In the Dublin Evening Post, the prevalent concern seems to be of a possible French invasion of

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<sup>100</sup> Freeman's Journal 5.March 1793

Ireland. On January 2., the formation of one such militia is completed: “Armagh militia. «An anonymous paragraph having lately appeared in some of the Dublin Newspapers, respecting said Regiment, I hereby inform the Public that it is complete to the present establishment ordered by Government»-Gosford, lieutenant-colonel-commander.”<sup>101</sup> One can only speculate about the contents of the 'anonymous paragraph', but it is evidence of the fervent opposition to the militia act. The act was intended to sanction the British Empire to recruit Irish militiamen to the continental battlefields, not only to supplement the defense of the British Isles. This fear can probably be attributed both to the would-be republicans that wanted no part of the war with the French, and the Ascendancy elements who was apprehensive about leaving the Ireland, and thus strengthening the English hold on the policies and realities of Ireland. The peasants, however, were by and large not affected by the bill as they were seldom of great enough fortune to partake in the militia. The act did, however, increase the number of firearms in the country outside the military's control. On the other hand, it also enhanced the authorities' ability to strike quickly should unrest erupt anywhere in the country.

What writers and letters the editors chose to publish can tell us about the political ideals of the editors as well as the author of the letters. One such example in the Dublin Evening Post is typical, but represents the opposite side of the political spectrum to the ironic comment on the relative safety on the roads in the Freeman's Journal. The letter is heavily ironic to my eye, and - if nothing else - is a good example both of the relative freedom of the press and the broad spectrum of political thought in Ireland at the time. Here is a short excerpt:

the impartial spirit of benevolence which at this period distinguishes the Irish nation, cannot be sufficiently admired. Overlooking, with stoical indifference, internal calamity- its treasures are generously lavished for the aggrandize-ment of the faithful allies of Britain, and the restoration of our ancient and tried friend, the Hous of- Bourbon.

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<sup>101</sup> Dublin Evening Post 2.January 1794

No people ever possessed the creative faculty in a higher degree, than the Proclamation Prints, whose fame for truth is now as firmly established as the Brussels oracle-Witness, the repeated conquest of St.Maloës, Perpignan, Strasburgh and Lanud- the mighty achievements of the Brunswick Herd and finally, the well-timed capture of the french...<sup>102</sup>

The tone is clearly ironic, and as the writer is anonymous the message is quite direct. It is a critique of the perceived gutlessness of the Irish parliament and the lack of self-governing evident in the recent developments in Ireland. It ridicules the efforts of the Empire to defeat the revolutionary forces and is quite harsh in its wording relating to the Irish aid to this enterprise.

In relation to the peasant communities, this excerpt has validity as it further underlines the opposing forces in Irish politics, and the different groups interested in nor opposed to the Catholic peasants.

The French war has historically been considered an important factor in explaining why the relief effort subsided. I have shown why the English were interested in pacifying Ireland while keeping them loyal and able to defend their land against French aggression.

Interestingly, the reform movement within the Catholic Church and the Catholic committee used the argument of the possibility of French aggression to underline the importance of Catholic relief in Ireland. Edmund Burke and large parts of the Irish and English administration felt that the most natural bulwark against radical republicanism was in fact the Catholics, who were seen as loyal, conservative and pro-monarchy. This is quite opposite to the ideas of the Ascendancy faction who labeled the Catholics as both republican and sectarian in nature. This is the core of the problem with the term “Catholic” in Ireland, as this, in no small part because of the Penal laws, was the term used to describe the majority of the people of Ireland. This has been discussed previously, but there is also a divergent view, penned by MOSHEIM (sic!), who argues that the Catholic religion in fact has a powerful

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<sup>102</sup> Dublin Evening Post 7. January 1794

revolutionary nature that cannot be suppressed by the learned classes. In effect, he discredits the view that religion in itself would bring stability and order, and he also dismisses the possibility of the Catholic faith being highjacked by radical republicanism.

It has been foretold, that the opposition of the clergy to the French revolution, would endanger the Catholic religion in France, and the events verifies the prophecy.-It is now predicted, that endeavors will be used to shew, not only that the Jewish institutions (as Mr. Paine and others have asserted) are Republican, but that the system of our savior and his disciples is democratical; in order that Christianity may form no obstacle to the revolution. - It will be said upon this occasion, «that the new testament teaches the perfect equality of men and of nations- the folly of titles, of honour, and the ceremonious modes of address; a denunciation of the rich, and a predilection for the poor, the corrupting tendency of commerce- a community of goods, in peculiar circumstances; a simplicity and an austerity of manners; the possible existence of luxury and hypocrisy, in an established clergy; - a CONTEMPT FOR WORLDY (sic!)wisdom, and the necessity of renovating the human mind; the certainty with which real wisdom will be esteemed as foolishness by those who are wise in their generation; the reproach attached to all reformers, and especially in the case of Christ, who of all reformers, was the greatest; the unaccountableness of man, except to his own conscience and to his maker- the merit of self-devotion, and even of martyrdom, to the cause of others; -the necessity of abandoning the dearest family ties, for adequate public objects- the importance of never despairing, -the natural attendance of troubles and commotions upon all reforms- the easy revolution of empires- the nothingness of human grandeur and the humbling of the proud- the possibility of those, who are poor and lowly, being made the instrument of the downfall of the great- the abolition of wars- the universal fraternization of mankind- the approach of the millennium preceded by times as eventful as the present; and the immortal rewards of those who are zealous till death, in the discharge of their duty...

...Let us not equally wanting in politics with the French. If the French revolution is not to be imitated, on account of the merits, neither is it to be drawn into a warning against other revolutions, on account of its outrages; for men, whenever they became uneasy, will seek a change, thinking that they can obtain their own liberty, abstracted from french cruelty and absurdity. It is then, that a choice of dangers may arise, from infidelity, on

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<sup>103</sup> Dublin Evening Post, 7.January 1794

one side, which will lessen the influence of the clergy, or from the new sect, of which the people will themselves be the priests and teachers, on the other. This superstition will be replaced, either by a political or religious enthusiasm. The servile war of Rome, the war of the peasants in Germany, at the time of the reformation, the war of the jacquelins in France, now reformed under the name of liberty and equality, all shew the power of the lower orders, and the influence of religious motives is seen everywhere...

...men of education and of property, and all lovers of quiet, will naturally struggle against the change, and found their arguments upon scripture, and the natural and civil rights of men; but if an union of religious and political motives (no matter whether true or untrue) affects the private soldiers of our armies, what is then to become of us I- Sat sapienti.

If such is our danger, if a mine like this may be sprung under our feet, the remedy seems to be only in a general peace; and in endeavoring to make the most of the people CONTENTED(sic!), instead of subjugating them by force, or blinding them by ignorance. Force may last a few years, but it will, on the whole, precipitate the evil, by exciting the passions of men, and it is certain, that the opinions of the mass of every nation must always prevail, whenever they are determined to enforce them!

MOSHEIM(sic!)<sup>104</sup>

This is a typical example of Enlightenment ideals. Mosheim shows that the assumption that the Catholic Church has no place of power within the French revolution is true. At the same time, he disagrees with those who argue that Catholicism is inherently anti-reform. In fact, he argues that religiously based revolutionary ideas are no harder to fathom than those revolutionary ideas that stem from other sources. In the second paragraph, he delivers a hard hitting and quite radical argument about the solution to the ongoing unrest in Ireland. He underlines the importance of ending oppression and offers a strong criticism of the Ascendancy and the concept of the Penal laws. He is a reformer who on the one side attacks the system that is in place, but on the other seems to disregard religion in itself as a driving factor behind radicalization. Mosheim's view on the causality in Ireland seems radical, but is

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<sup>104</sup> Dublin Evening Post, 7.January 1794

interesting from a modern point of view. That ideas of modern conflict theory was part of the public debate in the 1790s is exciting and interesting, as this means that at least parts of the Irish public must have felt that the unrest and ongoing radicalization of both parliamentary reformers and the peasants was more motivated by oppression and social want than by religion or radical republicanism.

By 1794, the United Irishmen were becoming more radicalized, and to spread information about their views and ideas, they relied on pamphlets and newspaper articles that went too far for the authorities, even considering the relative freedom of the press. In 1794, press reports on trials regarding printing unlawful thoughts and seditious ideals were on the increase. This suggests two things: 1) The pamphleteers were indeed vital in spreading the United Irishmen's ideas, and 2) the government felt the need to come down on behavior they must have felt was destabilizing an already discontented population. At this stage, the likes of Wolfe Tone and Napper Tandy were in the process of lobbying the French for support, thus breaking with the reformatory ideals of the Catholic Committee, and shortly after, the United Irishmen were labeled as dangerous and unlawful by the government. The United Irishmen were formally outlawed in 1794.

This excerpt of a report printed in the Freeman's Journal on January 5th 1794 on the trial of Mr. H. Rowan can be used as an argument in favor of the view that the republican ideals of the United Irishmen were important to the radicalization.

..The trial of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, esq; on an information ex officio, for a charge of having uttered and published on the 16th of December last, a certain libellous and seditious paper, purporting to be an address from the society called United Irishmen to the people of Ireland- exciting them to discontent, jealousies, and sedition against the kings government and the constitution of this realm, and calling them TO ARMS(sic!) with a seditious intent an purpose...

This trial was an important event, as Rowan was one of the founding members of the Dublin chapter of the United Irishman, and he was ultimately sentenced to two years imprisonment.

The sentence seems harsh, but when compared to other sentences related by the newspapers it can be surmised that Mr. Rowan received consideration on the grounds of his class and his position within the Irish gentry. Mr. Rowan's defense is written out in full, but the first part relating to his motivations for radicalization are the most interesting in view of this thesis' subject matter.

...He (the defendant) stated, that from the year 1784, in which the independence of Ireland was fully established, until the latter end of the year 1792, this country advanced in a progress of prosperity, in her agriculture, her manufactures, her trade, her credit, and her population hitherto unknown- agriculture was seen to smile over all our fields, commerce from all the world floated into all our ports, civilization with the blessing of plenty and contentment were rapidly disused thro` the lower orders of the people, and every thing wore the appearance of universal and permanent happiness throughout the kingdom.

Rowan's view on the economic boom of the 1780's seems linked to the relief effort. Irish trade and agriculture were afforded certain considerations and reforms during the early parts of Catholic relief, and the idea seems to be that Catholic relief is imperative to the continuation of the development of the country. He continues to press the ideals of relief as the natural and necessary step forward. He then talks about the inability of the legislature to speedily conclude the relief effort and the need for more radical action. He was charged with spreading seditious writings to the volunteer-movement, the organization thought of in part as the last-ditch defense against foreign aggression on Irish soil. As we have seen earlier, the volunteers were, at this stage, consisting of both Catholics and Protestants and, in certain instances, the movement represented somewhat separatist views, or at least the interest of the Irish gentry.

Most of the trial is reported by the journalist, who offers his own views on the proceedings and problems that arise. The following transcript is difficult to attribute to any one man in the courtroom, but seems to be a more general rendition of what was discussed.



A revolution had taken place in France, the instruments of which had proceeded to such lengths as to bring upon them a war from the allied powers on the continent. The emissaries of France disseminated the principles of their revolution thro' every county in Europe: they found ready proselytes among the needy and desperate adventurers in every country, who had no other hopes of advancing their situations, but by a total change in the established order of things; and no sooner had the allied armies retired from the french frontier, the commencement of the winter in 1792- than the french convention openly declared their intention of subverting monarchy throughout the world, of overturning all the established governments of Europe, and amongst the rest, that happy and invaluable constitution in the possession of which the British empire had long continued the envy and admiration of Europe.

In this country, as well as in every other, there are always to be found characters of a certain description, who, from circumstances of distress, ambition, caprice, turbulence, and a variety of other causes, are ever ready to promote a change in the established order of things- and always disposed, under the idea of improving the constitution, totally to subvert it....” “....In the year 1791, a number of heterogeneous characters in this stamp, collected themselves into a junto in the city, under the appellation of «the society of United Irishmen.» amongst them appeared some men, from whom better conduct might be expected...

These excerpts are examples of both the prevalent “Frenchscare”, which at that stage was a very real and reasonable worry, and the tendency of every facet of society that had access to the public debate to include declarations of undying loyalty to the constitution. It must have been natural for the government, the loyalists and the people wanting reform to put great stock in the development in France and its ability to radicalize the population.

Looking at the following description of the United Irishmen's behavior, the seriousness of the charges, and their direct relation to the peasant population is apparent.

in order to level their rolls of affociation, every artifice was exerted; the youthful, the aged, the inexperienced, the unsuspecting were seduced to sign their names as associates to their plan; even the unsuspecting farmers and graziers at country fairs and markets were cajoled out of their signatures; and at length the society came to a

resolution, that it was necessary to commence their military operations, for the more speedily effecting their plan, by embodying the first regiment of national guards.

..Let it suffice to state shortly, that it charged the government of the country with having in the proclamation and preparations before mentioned, to repel sedition, excited apprehensions of danger and sedition, which became the duty of the volunteers of Ireland to repel; and it therefore called upon the volunteers in these words, “citizens, to arms”. alleging they were warranted by the necessity of the times as well as the example of government, to arm for the defense of the constitution against all foes external and internal..

..It avowed as the immutable object of the society; first, the emancipation of the Catholics as a subordinate object, and declared that after that, they would go on- cry aloud! Even in the midst of the storm, conjured up by the witchcraft of a proclamation, and never cease till they had accomplished their two great objects, of reform in parliament, universal suffrage and representative legislation.

Although Rowan is charged with distributing leaflets and papers to the volunteers, the journalist includes other *modi operandi* for the organization in effectuating their tactic of getting as many signatories as possible to declarations addressed to Dublin Castle or intended for the general distribution in areas of the country. This suggests that even at this early stage, the society of the United Irishmen tried to incite unrest and ally themselves with other disgruntled factions of the population. They succeeded to a point, as many of the participants in the 1798 rebellion were peasants and people of the lower classes, but even though we can reasonably conclude that the recruitment of such groups was a central goal for the society, we cannot state that the republican ideals behind their concept of catholic relief was essential to the radicalization of the peasant populace. For that to be the case, one would have to disregard the numerous peasants under arms that did not take part in the rebellion.

As a conclusion to the proceedings, the reporter gives a brief account of the attorney general’s speech on the attempt to recruit volunteers by giving them the Northern Star.

...the attorney general having commented with much point and clearness on the mischievous tendency of this manifesto, and its obvious and indisputable purpose of overturning the constitution, and establishing french republicanism on its ruins, he adverted to the original volunteers of Ireland, whose sacred name had been usurped by a seditious banditti, and extolled them in the highest encomiums as the saviors of their country and its constitution, from the threatened invasion of a foreign foe, which hourly menaced our coasts. They were men, whose ranks were filled by the character, the property, and the respectability of the country; men known to and confided in by the government; who, so far from being actuated by jealousy towards them, had put arms into their hands, and invited them to co-operate for the public defense; men, who having affected the great object of the association, received the public thanks of the legislature, and retired peaceably from the field when public danger subsided. But were the national guards men of this description? -were the armed hordes that two years since paraded our streets at noon day, arrayed in the emblems and flourishing the banners of sedition. The comparison would be a blasphemy to the sacred name of the volunteers of Ireland, that must ever be dear in the memory of Irishmen, and form one of the most brilliant ornaments of the Irish history.<sup>105</sup>

The National Guard mentioned was a republican militia that must have been central in the eventual outlawing of the United Irishmen. The attorney general also gives proof to the problematic position that the government had put itself in by passing the Militia Act. The number of arms in the hands of nonmilitary personnel enabled groups like the Defenders to create a fighting force of greater consequence than had previously been the case, and the acute knowledge of this is evident in the strict punishments given to people arrested for the procuring of arms.

The trial against Mr. Rowan seems to be a step towards a harsher level of sanction from the government in relation to the distribution of pamphlets and prints. On the 22nd of May 1794, the unfortunate printer and proprietor of the National Evening Star sent a letter to the Dublin Evening Post, and possibly to other newspapers as well, lamenting his position and asking for the support of the United Irishmen on account of his service to their cause.

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<sup>105</sup> Freeman's Journal, 14 February 1794

To the public

The heavy sentence of Mr. Rowan the 7th of February last, for distributing that publication, removed every hope of the acquittal of others to be tried for printing the same paper. I was then within a few weeks of outlawry, in consequence of the violation of the society of united Irishmen's engagement to support the under the prosecution for publishing an article from the northern star, and I was held by bad to meet trial on the charge of printing and publishing the address of the united Irishmen to the volunteers, for distributing which Mr. Rowan had received sentence. I therefore thought it advisable to prepare a second time for a flight to America, rather than to abide a certain ruin of so desperate an issue...

...although it is very well known how much I have already lost by the society of United Irishmen, yet is is not known how much more I voluntarily offered to renounce in banishing myself from my country. For ten month I have had in my possession a press, types, cases, and other materials necessary to commence a newspaper, with a number of apprentices to the printing business still remaining with me, sufficient under my superintendence and with my own efforts to reduce the weekly expenditure of a paper in wages, to at least one-half what it would otherwise stand me in this great and decided advantage being near 3col. a year, ....if the United Irishmen were able to raise two hundred pounds to pay my sureties, what an eternal stigma upon their principles to pledge themselves, to pay.....is it not a proof that private property and public confidence are withdrawn from their society? I could ten months since have reestablished the national evening star, but for the pending prosecution, I now flatter myself I shall be able to give to the public the first number of that paper, as soon as a proper place can be fixed on for publication. In it i shall approve the purity of my political principles, and shew the same love of freedom by which i have been actuated from my earliest years. I remain the ever devoted servant to the people, W.P. Carey. Late printer and proprietor of the national evening star. May 16th, 1794.<sup>106</sup>

Besides being an entertaining read, this lament is another example the relative freedom enjoyed by the press. Carey feels unfairly/harshly treated by the United Irishmen, and argues that they have to be accountable and philanthropic in their dealings with him if they want to be a force to be reckoned with in contemporary Ireland. He points out that the loss of his business has come at great economic cost to himself, and that he has the right to compensation

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<sup>106</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 28.May, 1794

from the society, all the while professing his undying loyalty to the cause of freedom. This suggests a lack of will or power on the part of the authorities to stop illegal prints and newspapers, and further that one should not put too much stock in the governments' fears of a large scale republican uprising at this time. The extent of freedom of the press is impressive, insofar as Mr. Carey is able to get this letter printed without further action, as far as I have been able to determine, being taken against the editor of the Dublin Evening Post.

Uprisings were becoming an increasingly common feature of everyday life in Ireland, and the official militia seems to have been employed on several occasions. Most of the mentioned uprisings are on such a minute scale that it seems likely that they were local and not coordinated, but rather erupted as a result events in the neighborhood or perceived injustice on the part of local authorities.

the speedy and effectual check given by a party of the Dublin militia to the recent insurrection of defenders in the country of Cavan, will, it is hoped, convince those deluded wretches that they will no longer be suffered, under a misused leniency, to outrage the public tranquility, and to revive that system of plunder, devastation and murder, which for two years before distinguished them on so many occasions.

Their good friends the Tandys, the Rowans, and the convention of United Irishmen, have no hopes to flatter them at all; but have learned to reflect that the sword of justice, which so long slept in its scabbard, is at length drawn and uplifted for the determined purpose of assisting the laws, securing the peace, and defending the constitution of the realm, and for punishing those who shall dare to resist or disturb them<sup>107</sup>

The Defenders have been the cause of not more than two houses it is said, being left standing in the town of Ballynagh, where there were near 40. This devastation was unavoidable, for there was no other way of

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<sup>107</sup> Freeman's Journal may, 24, 1794

suppressing those desperate insurgents, but by setting fire to the houses, out of which they were firing upon the Militia, and had killed some of them. There are 24 of the Defenders in the gaol of Cavan and the army that came to the assistance of the militia at Ballynagh from Longford, on their return apprehended 16 , and lodged them in the gaol of the last mentioned place.<sup>108</sup>

In both these instances, the justice served by the militia was swift and brutal. The Freeman's Journal is true to form in explaining the burning of houses as necessity. It may have been necessary from a policing point of view, but it is tempting to interpret the increasing force insurgents were being dealt with as a sign that the country was in a more fragile state than was the case in 1793.

The Journal prove their suspicions that the United Irishmen were behind these latest disturbances, but with just these excerpts from the newspaper relating to the incidences, it is difficult to discern the veracity of the allegations. The only thing that one can conclude at this stage is that the United Irishmen were outlawed and regarded as a threat, not only by the loyalist press, but also by Dublin Castle.

The duality of British policies towards Catholics has been examined. This note in the Freeman's Journal serves as a good example of said duality:

The guard of honor to his holiness the Pope is at present composed of 500 British cavalry. It is strange that those troops called British Heretics, should be chosen by his Holiness as a forlorn hope to defend the seat of St. Peter against the attacks of his Catholic subjects, and the dangerous fury of Atheistical Republicans.<sup>109</sup>

Aside from the snide tone, it is worth noting that the British Empire sided with the Holy See in the conflict raging on the continent. Not surprising, considering what has been discussed previously in this thesis, but the note's inclusion is warranted because it is printed in the

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<sup>108</sup> Freeman's Journal may, 24, 1794

<sup>109</sup> Freeman's Journal 19.may 1794

Freeman's Journal in just this manner. The religious aspect of peasant radicalization is difficult to discern and assess apart from the sectarian unrest in the north, and the insistence of especially the Freeman's Journal to include the Catholic faith in relation to the perceived dangers of Catholic relief strengthens Bartlett's view about the much mentioned "Protestant scare".

## 1795

In 1794, the society of the United Irishmen commanded a lot of attention across the newspapers that have been examined. One of the main points of criticism against the society was their claim that they were the upholders of the constitution, and that they were, at heart, loyal to the principles of the law. As in a modern public debate, the argument centered around who had the power of definition. A central battle waged seemed to be about which side had the right to claim the defense of the constitution as their sole property and aim. The Convention Act and the Gunpowder Act, both passed in 1793, had curtailed the ability to exert political pressure through might of arms for groups like the Volunteers, but the aforementioned Militia Act countermanded the impact of these acts, at least regarding the amount of weapons in the country.

Several bills and acts were passed in the spring of 1795 as a countermeasure from Mr. Pitts' Cabinet against the increasing unrest both in England and Ireland. The following response to these measures, which must be seen as a defense of them, gives a certain finality to the answer of the question of whether republicanism as grounds for radicalization and peasant unrest is a perceived reality to the readers of the Freeman's Journal.

Just like with religion, it is difficult, based on the newspapers, to assess the realities of the peasant communities, but the thoughts of the legislature and the bourgeois are of importance. If the people in charge feel threatened by social unrest, their methods of dealing with it will correspond with their conviction of what the cause(s) of the unrest is. The increasing tension,

both in the public debate and in the realities of the revolutionary war, affected the peasants through increasingly severe and brutal sanctions on crime and on everyday life.

The secret committee appointed by the house of commons of Great Britain, have clearly developed the secret machinations which have been too long fermenting in these kingdoms, for the production of universal anarchy, and the total subversion of our happy constitution, the destruction of all property, and the massacre of its owners.

By the timely and spirited interference of the British minister, these countries have again avoided the horrors of a civil war, into which they were about to be precipitated by the agents of republicanism.

We can now view in their true but abominable colors the patriotic principles of corresponding societies, and the partisans of reform, who, under the cob-web veil of a pretended attachment to the purity of the constitution, have incessantly labored in secret for its destruction, by transplanting into those realms the seeds and the germs of all those dreadful horrors that have so long distracted France, and spread the horrors of a sanguinary warfare over the face of Europe.

The convention bill, which, on its first introduction to the parliament was pronounced by certain pseudo patriots as violating and totally subversive to the principles of our constitution, turns out on the contrary to be its salvation, and merits for the right hon. gentleman who brought forward the measure, the eternal gratitude of his country, had it not been for that bill the destructive system of France would have instantly reared its head in this country; an illegitimate parliament at Tarah or Athlone, would have, ere now, assumed the functions of a french assembly- would have issued their edicts of denunciation against the established orders of legislature in the realm- would have detailed the principles of Tom Paine, to rouse the turbulence of the mob- would have called on the defenders in the north, the white boys in the south, and the national guards of the metropolis, to support their authority- and would have held out the wealth and the property of every man above the rank of the rabble, attached to the law or the constitution, as the prize of anarchy's desperation and massacre.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Freeman's Journal 24.May 1795



If this letter is an indication of what most of the readers of the Freeman's Journal felt then it is several interesting aspects worthy of mentioning. The mentioning of the ancient king-seat of Tarah suggests a siege-mentality on the part of the author. Tarah was the place where the high kings of ancient Ireland were crowned, and the mentioning of defenders, white-boys and the National Guard seems to suggest that the author feel that the revolutionary ideals of the French revolution could potentially unite these different factions. This is partly true of course, as many of those who partake in the 1798 rebellion come from different groups with different political agendas. The problem with such an analysis is the fact that not all members of said groupings partook in the rebellion.

In the Dublin Evening Post the tone is different. The letter which now will be partly presented is a protest on the pressure that faces the Irish Parliament. This thesis does not aim to discuss the road that eventually ended up in the Act of Union, but the fact that a longstanding Irish parliamentary tradition was under pressure could very well be an aspect of the general will to radicalize. On the peasants' radicalization it is difficult to draw conclusions from such inquiries, but the indirect impact of increasingly angry and dissatisfied gentry on the peasant communities is very much interesting.

not only the right of the Irish house of commons was denied, but the Irish house of commons itself was put in comparison with a gang of lawless ruffians. He should have temerity enough to act in such a manner; but his wonder must be increased if that man were found to be a lawyer of the highest official situation in this profession- he should still more have wondered if this insolence had dared to vent itself pulicly, and his wonder must be raised into astonishment if the insolence had been not only vented in public, but in a full assembly of another house of parliament. That this attack had been made in the circumstances he had mentioned he was ready to prove- he was ready to repeat the words of this man which had been taken down and which he could now produce if any member desired to Mr Hoare....

It was publicly declared, that neither the house, nor the committee of the house had the power of administrating an oath- and this declaration was made by the fist lawyer in the kingdom, as far as office could constitute

professional eminence. Such a doctrine could be broached by none but a man- of ignorance. However he might be skilled in the technical parts of his profession, however he might be calculated to practice law as a lucrative trade- by sedulous study of cases and reports- and by overbearing manners- he must be a stranger to the law of parliament which was to be found only in the record of parliament, and which were founded on principles too wide to be comprehended within the narrow reach of his confined, though pert and presuming intellect. The audacity which had first dared to utter such a doctrine he had called absurd, because it went to deprive the highest council- the magnum tancilium- of the realm, of that privilege which the meanest court of the country enjoyed, to enable it to come at truth and to give respectability to its decrees: it left the grand assembly of the kingdom a nominal power of examining, but deprived it of the only privilege which could make that entity efficient, and reduced them to the necessity of listening to the miserable chat which men might think proper to indulge at their bar, as evidence. He had called it insolent, because not only it was in itself a violent assault on the privilege of an assembly who were the only judges of their own privileges, but it was an assault made in language which nothing but insolence could dictate.<sup>111</sup>

The tone in this letter is quite harsh and it stands to reason to argue that the parliamentarians of Ireland wanted to protect their influence. It is difficult to conclude that the peasants were overly concerned by the discussions in parliament, but to argue that the general mood of society can contribute to the thoughts and actions of 'the lower classes' seems valid.

The newspapers did not only consist of dry reports and letters with colorful language. A persistent feature of the papers seems to have been small poems, verses and songs. These are generally humorous in tone, and with a tinge of the sarcastic. As the imagery and language must be considered as 'learned' the impact such writings would have on the peasants of the day is probably limited, but as this thesis tries to examine the reasons and motivations behind the radicalization of the peasants the verses should be discussed. The verses are generally comments on the political situation and ongoing debate, and give a different view of the thought processes and arguments that seem to have been given weight. A minute analysis of

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<sup>111</sup> Dublin Evening Post 20. February 1795

the imagery and content of the excerpts of verses would take us too far afield from the subject matter of the thesis, but some short comments are in order.

a paragraph in rhyme. Of the poetical beauties and spirit exhibited in Mr. Burkes's letter to a noble lord.

...he took from the crown what the crown gave away, and like Bentinck grew rich by his share of the prey; for lion-like kings, fuck the blood first in sport, then the offals they fling to the jackalls at court. To the public tribunal be this russel led, I'll impeach him myself- tho`two hundred years dead. He raised a rebellion, left eucks in the lurch, but his crime grew enormous by robbing the church. Is my pension like his? Oh! Your grace answers nay, the crown gave me mine- but the west indies pay. If your grant I enjoyed of tyrannical date, I'd restore it again to the church and the state; tho'i candidly own, I your virtue admire, if you keep it yourself, left you slur your old fire.<sup>112</sup>

This excerpt seems to be a satirical critique of Burkes' pragmatical and 'eager to please' attitude towards the English king and his cabinet. As long as Burke is secure in his holdings, he is willing to sell out Irish interests in cases such as the restrictions on foreign trade, a huge topic for discussion in all of the papers. It goes to show the seemingly increasing discontent in the Irish society. The French revolution and the wars waged on the continent is not as all-encompassing as could be imagined. The debate in 1795 is very much alive with more mundane matters. These matters are prominent in the Dublin Evening Journal, and could serve as an argument of that the radicalization of the country was not as total as a reading of just the Dublin Post and the Freeman's Journal could suggest. On the same date a satirical verse on the hysteria of the side of the 'monarchists' appears:

...their murders were cast for two thousand long years- they are cannibals, footpads, assassins and robbers, alchemists, bravos, banditti and robbers, republicans, atheists, and sans-coulette knaves, revolutionist, girondists, rebelpierre`s shaves. How I tremble for Britain- O, Portland protect her!

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<sup>112</sup> Dublin Evening Post 9. April 1795

And Windsors proud keep now protects before plains, but if the dire tempest of Gallia prevails, on the shore will be cast periwinkles and whales. While safe from the shipwreck, I rest in full glory, a protestant, papist, an old Whig and Tory<sup>113</sup>

This verse seems to ridicule the idea that the French are on the verge of invading the country, and the idea that a conspiracy between the republicans and other groups in Ireland is in place. The term 'banditti' is often used when labeling the participants in defenders-unrest in the Freeman's Journal and the Dublin Journal, and it is interesting that the author seemingly scoffs at the idea that these 'banditti' would have anything to do with the shaves of 'rebelpierre'. This is of course interesting in relation to the subject matter in that the idea of a large uprising by several disgruntled groups finding common cause was not a foregone conclusion in the minds of every part of Irish gentry. The attempted landing of French forces in 1796 and the rebellion in 1798 would in part suggest that such ideas and fears were well founded, but it is still important to bear in mind that the fact that certain parts of Irish public debate disregarded this possibility could speak volumes on the many faceted reasons and motivations behind the peasant radicalization.

The last verse I choose to include is one that further strengthens the many faceted reality behind the causalities of peasant radicalization. On 15. September, 'An Epigram' is printed in the Dublin Evening Post. Written by someone who calls himself 'M.W', the epigram offers another solution to the present unrest in Ireland, the idea that social want is at the core of the problem.

For the dublin evening post.

An epigram.

Hibernia threatened by instant invasion,

(those damnable french the dire occasion)

consults how best to protect the nation,

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<sup>113</sup> Dublin Evening Post April. 9 1795

and thus prevent it from risque of damnation,  
and old politician who head the debate,  
when he came to speak, having rose from his seat,  
said- by cackling of geese old Rome was once saved,  
and thus prevented the stat`s being enslaved  
then all roar our, a JOB, nor think `tis absurd-  
no more of invasion- you may take my word.

MW.<sup>114</sup>

The signatory talks about the ongoing debate on Catholic relief in Ireland, and the idea that relief would bring stability to the country. The term 'wild geese' would suggest such an interpretation as the 'wild geese' was a term used on the defeated Jacobites that ran away to the continent after their defeat in 1691. The idea that Catholic emancipation would lessen the discontent throughout the country was, as we have seen, both an argument used by the Catholic Committee and Mr. Burke. The interesting part in this Epigram however is the presenting of the idea that 'a JOB' would be the best solution for the masses.

An interesting letter from Arthur O'Connor is printed in the Dublin Evening Post in October in 1795. As one of the parliamentarians who ended up being a member of the United Irishmen, his letter, presumably to his constituents, shows his defense for his radical views. The mixture of republicanism and religion is evident in his arguments and might stem from the United Irishmen's attempt to recruit members from many different groups and of many different persuasions. The tone has changed from the earlier stress on the importance of Catholic relief, and seems to drift more toward attacking the before shown perceived inability of the Irish legislature to protect Irish interest.

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<sup>114</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 15. September 1795

to the free electors of the county of Aurs.

...but thanks be to God it has been defeated; thanks be to God that the love of liberty and of the country have prevailed, and that protestant and catholic are alike convinced that ON THE UNION OF BOTH DEPENDS THE SALVATION OF ALL- those who sell the rights of their country will call this by the name of that treason they live by committing- but if to promote the union of Irishmen be treason, and if to place the liberties of my country on its true republican pasts be treason, then do I glory in being a traitor- it is a treason I swills seal with my blood and that I hope to have engraved on my tomb. I know that an attempt on the part of the executive to subvert our liberties has sanctioned our revolution, and I feel that if the legislative becoming more corrupt than the executive should join in attempting a similar subversion, not only by force, but by the more deadly corruption...

Arthur O'Connor<sup>115</sup>

The tone is at this stage quite candid and out in the open, but this is perhaps understandable as the United Irishmen are banished and the efforts for reform within the parliamentary confines are abandoned. What we are dealing with here is a country with a powerful group of people that has less and less to lose by radicalizing further as they are already shunned and opposed by the lawful authorities. As we have established the link between the United Irishmen and the peasant radicalization it seems fair to say that the rhetoric and press put on the peasants by the United Irishmen recruiters would increase. This can perhaps partly explain the partial attendance of the peasant class at the 1798 rebellion as it can make the peasants feel that they are in for more than they bargained for.

The Dublin Journal is as we know an independent newspaper on the far right of politics in Ireland. On the third of December in 1795 a letter was printed in the paper, and it warrants attention as it is both indicative of the rhetoric's of the day and presents us with some thoughts regarding the peasant class. It should be noted that the letter concerns itself with a

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<sup>115</sup> The Dublin Evening post, 22. October 1795

trip to Ulster, the region in the North where sectarian unrest was an established fact, both in this thesis and in the minds of the Journal's readers.

To the editor of the Dublin Journal-

on my return from the province of Ulster a few days ago, as I passed through a county not less noted for a spirit of insurrection than for its fertility and extent, I fell into a serious train of reflexions on the strange contrast that was exhibited between the lenient and flourishing aspect of the country, and the seditious and predatory spirit of its inhabitants.

The corn was reaping on every side, and the cheerful and industrious efforts of the laborer seemed to promise a speedy termination to a favourable harvest. While plenty crowned the fields, and the farmer was in the act of gathering the fruits of his expectations, it could not have occurred to a rational stranger, that discontent pervaded the lower class, and that the tillers of a productive soil, were the very persons, perhaps, that defeated, by their nightly practices, the bounties of heaven, and the cares of the government by which they were protected. Of the western parts of Europe, this island alone appears to have been exempted from the ravages of the present extended war, and the horrors of its attendant -famine. To the mild administration of her laws, and to the victorious navies of Great Britain..." "...and to that kingdom which are daily loaded with the abuse of the ignorant, and assailed by the machination of the treasonable herd! Their conduct, at this moment is only reconcilable to the dictates of folly or madness. Instead of displaying gratefulness of the peculiar mercies of providence, they murmur at its dispensations and incapacitate themselves to the enjoyments of these gifts..." "...It seems, in truth, particularly reserved to the Irish vulgar, to persecute, without any motive or apology for persecution, and from the destruction of the brute creations, to leave vestiges of their wantonness and imbecility in the bosom of inanimate nature!

(But our laws are partial and our constitution imperfect: freedom has erected her....)

This is the watchword of the artful instigator of insurgency, and the creed of his deluded disciples. If yet the fate of the unhappy country, from which these doctrines have been disseminated, if her crimes and her misfortunes have failed of their proper effect, and serve not as beacons to warn adventurers of the perils of her principles, let the apparent impossibility of a connection with France, recall the sense of danger to the misguided multitude, and rouse them from the delirium to which faction and weakness have plunged their senses- The prevailing mental plague is continued, at least, to the continent of Europe. A line of circumvallation has been drawn by

British valour around her perturbed and inhospitable shores. The infection shall not spread across the narrow channel, where, as on the ocean itself, the British flag waves triumphant, and speaks of glory, of wealth and security to those favored isles. As soon might the wild bears of the wilderness, the lions of Numidia, and the tygers of India, attempt to fraternize with the ferocious and nocturnal predator of Ireland. The [UNINTELLIGIBLE] preclude them from the hopes of so beneficial an alliance; as the bold and loyal rulers of those seas have placed an eternal bar to the fraternal embrace of terrorists and moderatists; of the worthy adherence of a Robespierre or a Tassion.

It is impracticable in the limits to which this essay is confined, to speak to every point in a question of such magnitude. The unfounded causes of discontent that prevail in this island- a comparison between her situation and that of her neighbors- and the stronger ground, the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] may form the subject of a future paper- I have not adverted to what has been strongly insisted on by abler writers- the difference of region, as a motive for the disturbances, that at once shake and disgraces the country.- I confess that I am inclined to doubt the influence of religion on the unprincipled body, called defenders, whos system of equality, and the destruction of all law, government and order, appear to be their only object, it cannot be denied that the imprudent agitation of the catholic question was the signal of, and importer of vigour to the disorders on foot. And if the celebrated madmen of antiquity, who set the temple of Ephesus in flames, had been held up to ages as the dupe of extravagant ambition, what will posterity think of our modern erostratus, who, with a more sane, tho` perhaps less disinterested spirit, tossed the brand of sedition for the destruction of the established church of his country? Gracchus.

Dublin 3d September, 1795.<sup>116</sup>

The letter contains many aspects that concern the subject matter of this thesis. The writer signs with the pseudonym Gracchus. The signing by Roman, historical names are quite common and can often be used as a marker on the politics of the author. There are several romans of repute that was named Gracchus, but my guess is that it is Tiberius Gracchus, a roman tribune, that is the origin of the name. He tried to start agricultural reforms in Rome and was killed by the senate. This could label the signatory as a republican, but then the question on the letter's inclusion in the Dublin Journal arises. The content of the letter

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<sup>116</sup> Dublin Journal 3.September, 1795



however seems very pro Empire, and presents a baffled disbelief over the continued unrest in a country that has so much going for it. When the writer tries to explain the unrest however, several very interesting points are made. He disregards the impact of religion as a motivating factor for the Defenders, and labels them as revolutionary republicans with their “system of equality, and the destruction of all law, government and order”. He continues by attacking the impact of Catholic relief and argues that this was an essential factor in the radicalization of the masses. When he ends the letter with a gloomy statement on the difficult future of the established Irish church we can conclude that he presents the kind of argument that was typical for the Protestant Ascendancy. The destruction of their privileges would end the prosperity of Ireland and is a kind of argument that we have heard before. The difference here is the willingness to separate the issue of religion from the fact of peasant radicalization.

The Freeman’s Journal is in 1795 very concerned by the Defender unrest. A large amount of articles and notices regarding the unlawful activities of the group are printed at regular intervals throughout the year. When we know that the Freeman’s Journal is a “Castle paper” it is reasonable to assume that to a certain extent at least, the content of the paper is sanctioned by Dublin Castle. This does not mean that Dublin Castle took on an editorial role, but would probably entail the paper’s willingness to present facts as the authorities would want them presented. The fact that the Freeman’s Journal was increasingly unpopular and disregarded as a serious source of news should be kept in mind and the labeling of all peasant unrest as “defender-unrest” should be interpreted with caution. It is important to present some of these articles however as they do relate to the subject matter directly.

extract of a letter from Mullingar, march 21.

«a few nights ago, a number of defenders came to the house of-----Simons, near Balleyhaife, and fired several shots, and dashed several large stones against the door. Old Simons stood at on side, with a pitchfork in his hand, and his son at the other, with the bayonet, there being neither a gun nor a pistol in the house. After many efforts, they drove the board out, and a fellow put his hand in to pull out the bar, on which the old man gave him a dreadful salute on the face with his fork; those about the door then fled from it, but in an instant, a

window in the room was broken to pieces, and one of them darted himself through, on which old Simons ran to it, and plunged his fork into him also, but before he could do any more execution, the rest crowded upon him, stabbed the son and wounded himself in many places, and were determined to take his life immediately.

In this deplorable situation, when father and son expected nothing but immediate death, providence intercepted, and saved their lives in the following manner:

The noise of breaking the door was so great that it alarmed the inhabitants at some distance who instantly fired three shots, which gathered a number of armed people, who ran to their relief, which the defenders hearing, went off precipitately, leaving several guns, and other articles behind them.

Young Simons got a dreadful stab under the eye, and the old man is severely wounded, but both it is expected will be well in a few days.<sup>117</sup>

Monday last Bartholomew Mulkern and Mr. Fea, were executed the front of the new jail, pursuant to the sentence; and on Thursday Thomas Coyle and James Rice were also executed.

HUGH MAGUIRE, WHO WAS TO HAVE SUFFERED AT THE SAME TIME, HAS BEEN RESPITED TO THE 20TH OF MAY.(sic!)<sup>118</sup>

George McGennis, found guilty of drinking a seditious toast, but being strongly recommended, was only sited a mark, and to be imprisoned a week.<sup>119</sup>

The first extract is typical for the year and underlines the “siege-mentality” Thomas Bartlett presents. These types of descriptions are abundant and the defenselessness of the victims is almost always underlined. The concept of brave but often futile resistance and the entrance of divine providence to save the day is a common theme for these kinds of articles. The Defenders are in this article attacking a house without any motivation given, but it seems to follow the pattern of more northern unrest as the Peep O’day boys and the Defenders was in conflict and often tried to exclude the opposition from certain parts of their counties. Two people being attacked and besieged in their one story home seems to indicate that these were

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<sup>117</sup> The Freeman's Journal March 25, 1795

<sup>118</sup> The Freeman's Journal June 24, 1795

<sup>119</sup> The Freeman's Journal March 25, 1795

craftsmen or farmers and not part of the gentry. Ballyhaife is a small farming community just below the border to Ulster and strengthens the argument that this was part of the sectarian unrest in the region.

The next notice is just a note regarding the execution of four men. Whether these men were rebels or otherwise involved in sedition is impossible to say, but the increase of such notices in the papers warrants its inclusion.

The last one is peculiar. In a year where the fronts are hardening and the authorities keep implementing more and more laws and rules to control the increasing unrest the apparent leniency of the verdict passed on Mr. McGennis is strange. The facts of the trial and accusation are lost, but the sentence is more of a slap on the wrist than a clear indication that the authorities fear rebellion.

In continuance of these types of articles, notices and prints there are two other types of articles that are often printed. These two are the governmental proclamations relating to specific acts of crime and excerpts from trials against defendants accused of crimes in relation to the current problems in Ireland. This can be said to increase the weight on the argument of the Freeman's Journal being a Castle newspaper, and that it presents the cases and proclamations deemed important by Dublin Castle. The hidden transcript in the Freeman's Journal is in the selection of newspaper articles rather than in the "hidden" content of the articles themselves.

BY THE LORD LIEUTENANT AND COUNCIL OF IRELAND. A PROCLAMATION.

CAMDEN,

whereas we have received information on oath, that on the 13th of July instant, Thomas Ryan, esq a magistrate of the county Kildare, who had been engaged during the course of that day in the execution of his duty, in lodging in the goal of that county several prisoners charged with being defenders, and with having committed several outrages against the public peace; and that he said Thomas Ryan, on his return home on the evening of that day, was way laid by several men in arms, one of whom discharged a gun at the said Thomas Ryan, and thereby wounding him severely in the head and neck; and that just on the said Thomas Ryan's endeavoring to make his way to his own house, in the said county, after being so wounded, several other men in arms fired several shots at him the said Thomas Ryan, who with difficulty escaped to his own house, which was surrounded

during a part of the evening and night of that day, by a number of persons, who appeared to have an intention to destroy and burn the said house.”<sup>120</sup>

«whereas we have received information on oath that as the rev. George Knipe, of Castle-Rickard, in the county of Meath, clerk, was riding from his house to Summer-hill, in said county, on Monday the 10th day of august instant, to attend a meeting of the well-disposed inhabitants of that neighborhood, who were invited by the magistrates to take the oath of allegiance, and express their abhorrence of defenders, he was, about midway between his house and Rathmolion, fired upon by some person concealed behind a hedge, with a blunderbuss; and that the said shot was fired, as informant believed, either with intent to discourage any magistrate from taking an active part against the defenders, or because two persons of that description had been killed some time before, in an attack on the house of said rev. George Knipe.<sup>121</sup>

In this excerpt we revisit “the well-disposed inhabitants” that we know from an earlier declaration in this chapter. It seems natural to assume that the facts of the article are correct, but the most interesting aspect of the excerpt is perhaps the informant’s thoughts on as to why the attacks happened. The idea that defenders attacked people who worked for the authorities seems to entail the possible perceived animosity between the peasants/defenders and the authorities themselves. If the authorities as a whole are the enemy, the way to open rebellion seems shorter than if the problem is perceived to be of more local origin. This idea of the “enemy” of the peasants cannot be claimed with any great certainty based on this excerpt, but the idea could explain some aspects of the continued radicalization.

A commission intelligence is printed in the Freeman’s Journal on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December. This article is interesting both as an example on the rule of law but also, in relation to the possible hidden transcript in its inclusion in the paper, as a way to celebrate the judicial security awarded the inhabitants of Ireland by the authorities.

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<sup>120</sup> Freeman’s Journal, 25. July, 1795

<sup>121</sup> Freeman’s Journal, 15. August, 1795

Commission intelligence. Thursday dec. 24.

This day, Thomas Murphy and Michael Maguire was tried on an indictment for high treason, in imagining and compassing the king`s death, and adhering to his enemies. The specific points of accusations were, associating themselves with defenders, deliberating and conferring with them on the means of levying war within this realm, and overthrowing the king`s government and the protestant religion as by law established, and for aiding the French to an invasion of this country, for seducing, and enlisting one John Jacob and Thomas Roden, soldiers of the 104th regiment, and giving them daily pay to aid their treacherous purposes, and for administering unlawful oaths to the said soldiers, binding them to be true to the French...” “...the first witness called was Thomas Roden, who was examined by Mr. Attorney general. He was a simple young lad, and could not identify Maguire either as he stood in the dock, or afterwards when brought forward in the side bar, and placed amongst a number of other persons. The attorney general declared that though he was convinced the young man`s embarrassment merely arose from his never before seeing the form of a court of justice, and not from any other reason, he would not as he had so appeared impeach the life of any man upon the testimony of this witness, and immediately relinquished the prosecution of Maguire and Murphy, who were of course acquitted and discharged- as were three other persons...”<sup>122</sup>

The accusations against the defendants are undoubtedly serious in nature, and as we shall see, often gave severe punishment. The accusation mentions the protestant religion, and the defendants` attempt to overthrow it. In the next sentence the inclusion of the French threat is presented, and yet again we are left with no clear answers as to why, in this case, the defendants allegedly radicalized and choose to do treasonous acts. The acquittal of the defendants is, as mentioned above, possibly a way of showing the rule of law, and the idea that the constitution was the best way forward in relation to the personal security of all inhabitants of Ireland. At this time the Freeman`s Journal was labeled by many as unimportant and a tool for the government so its impact may have been limited, but this could be said to strengthen the thought that this interpretation on the choice of words in the article is warranted.

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<sup>122</sup> Freeman`s Journal, 25. December, 1795

The Freeman's Journal gives on the same date a description of a sentence against James Weldon who is judged guilty in helping the French.

James Weldon, you have been convicted upon the clearest evidence, of a crime the most wicked and enormous known to the laws of the country- that of high treason against your sovereign, under whose auspicious reign, this country has flourished for 35 years, and of endeavoring to subvert that happy constitution, which for many centuries has been the envied blessing of these realms..."

"...The learned judge, baron George, then proceeded under marked feelings of sympathy, to pronounce the usual sentence of the law upon the unfortunate prisoner, which was, that he be taken from the bar to the place from whence he came, where his irons were to be struck off, and from whence he should be drawn to the place of execution, commonly called the gallows, where he should be hanged by the neck, but not until he is dead; for while yet alive, his bowels are to be taken out and burnt before his face, then his head to be cut off, and his body separated in four quarters, to be at the king's disposal..."<sup>123</sup>

This article clearly makes it natural to assume that the main perceived threat by the English and Irish government was French aggression and attempted conquest of the British Isles. A seditious toast could give you a fine, being a defender seems to end in a goal, but aiding the French ends up with a medieval execution. In relation to the subject matter, the reasons and motivations behind peasant radicalization, it is difficult to discern one defining reason, but the view on the subject presented in the Freeman's Journal in the above article should be noted.

In the Dublin Evening post in 1795 the most distinguishing feature is its focus on politics. The focus on Catholic emancipation is evident at a time when the reform movement faltered, and the radicalization of the Catholic Committee and other groups were a fact. The promotion of Lord Fitzwilliam as lieutenant governor in Ireland gave cause to hope for continued reform as he had earlier been an outspoken supporter of catholic emancipation. However, the reform process stalled and the rising radicalization of republicans and promoters of enlightenment

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<sup>123</sup> Freeman's Journal 25. Desember, 1795

continued. This is not strange perhaps when you bear in mind the very aggressive tone of which this letter penned by Owen O’Nial on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January is voiced.

To the Catholics of Ireland.

Countrymen, the present crisis is decisive of your freedom; and it cheers my patriotic shade, to see by some resolutions which have found their way to this lower world- that your brethren of Dublin who hitherto were foremost in your cause, are fully sensible of its importance. I make no doubt, but the sentiments as well as the interest of all, are already combined upon this subject; - and notwithstanding the certainty of great and extensive support, you should still remember, that important changes in policy or government, have seldom been affected by the single operation of internal means- but that the success of the justest cause, is often owing to the coincidence of external circumstances- which ought therefore to be considered as the proffered alliance of heaven; and they alone are wise who know the value of opportunity, and improve THAT(sic!) whilst they can, which may never return.

The recent change in the administration of this country is highly advantageous to you claims: it is expected with confidence from the character of lord Fitzwilliam, and that of his friends, that the found and honorable policy of uniting you to the constitution, by an equal participation in ALL its advantages, will at last be adopted.

Such an assurance may brighten your hopes, but should not make you relax your efforts- It is reasonable that your warmest advocates should consult your interest more than yourselves? Or had ever more friends, that when you were active, spirited, and determined?- Though you should have the best founded hope of receiving the support of the present government, do not rely upon that alone- How often has the ship which rode triumphant through the tempest, been lost within sight of port by a too fatal security? How often has a despised enemy under the shelter of its supposed weakness prepared the defeat of a too confident host`!

Assist your friends, by shewing to parliament itself that the universal will which it is bound to respect, calls unequivocally for emancipation. Sign by thousands in every quarter of the kingdom a petition of intent. Enter into resolutions declaratory of any local oppression, such as the foul machinations of vindictive great men.

Instruct the representatives of your respective counties and towns; they will think, depend upon it, that it is better to yield with a good grace, than incur your displeasure by an unavailing opposition. Manifest to all parties that

the power you possess and shall acquire, will be as certainly employed against the enemies of your liberties, as gratefully devoted to every virtuous man who shall prompt them.

Owen O Nial.<sup>124</sup>

The interesting aspects in this letter are numerous. Firstly, the name that is used to sign it is the same name as the Irish hero Owen O’Niall who fought for an independent and Catholic Ireland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He would be even more popular as an “Irish patriot” during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the use of his name speaks volumes. The O’Nialls were the most powerful family in Ulster at the time of Gaelic power and one of his main goals were to rid Ireland of the protestant settlers. When we pair these facts with the established truth of the “Protestant scare” we can argue that the tone of the letter is not meant consolatory. This does not entail that we are dealing with a hidden transcript as Owen O’ Niall would have been a known man. The author wishes for the Catholic masses to trust in the new lord lieutenant, but not to cease their efforts for reform. He does not say that violent opposition is in order, but encourages declarations and petitions as the way forward. However, the form and tone of the letter gives off an air of aggression and insistence that should not be overlooked when interpreting its content.

The pro-reform politics of lord lieutenant Fitzwilliam is evident in his response to one of the previously proposed declarations sent in by the Catholics of Roscommon.

Response from the lord lieutenant Fitzwilliam to the Catholics of Roscommon.

Sir,

to the Catholics of the county of Roscommon. I wish you to convey my thanks in terms of peculiar satisfaction. I owe them to the spirit and cheerfulness with which they come forward at this important moment, giving the most unequivocal test of their loyalty, and waiting only till his majesty shall point out the mode, in which his majesty may employ and direct their exertions, in opposing all the enemies of his majesty`s person and government, in

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<sup>124</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 13 January, 1795



guarding our excellent constitution, and in preserving the internal peace and tranquility of the country. Such a disposition and such sentiments prove them to be deserving of the highest favours, which his majesty in his paternal wishes or parliament in its wisdom and liberality can confer upon them.<sup>125</sup>

This response is similar to earlier responses and seems to be a-political in that the wording and sentiment carried in such responses are alike whether the petitioners are for reform or against it. The difference between this and earlier lord lieutenants' answers is perhaps the willingness to include the Catholics of Roscommon as defenders of the constitution. His use of the sentence "Such a disposition and such sentiments prove them to be deserving of the highest favours" could be meant as a way of professing his support for reform. Then why did not reform happen? The radicalization of the republican movement was, as we know, underway, and the official response with stapling the United Irishmen as illegal was forthcoming. The answer is difficult to discern from the sources at hand, but one can understand the desperation felt by the people supporting parliamentary reform when the main hindrance to reform through the parliament seems to be the parliament itself:

Remarks to the letter to lord Carlisle.

Thus it plainly appears that the full emancipation of the Irish Catholics was concluded on in the British Cabinet.- the principle was agreed on, and it was afterwards refused, merely to screen from public knowledge, that the places, emoluments and influence of ONE MAN(sic!), appeared more estimable in the eyes of Mr. Pitt, than three millions of Irish subjects.- If earl Fitzwilliam had not remained firm in his dismissal of that one man, every other point would have been conceded, and the catholic business would have gone on without interruption, or being started up as an object of terror.

We find also in this letter that the catholic emancipation was not only settled before lord Fitzwilliam left London, but continued in full train towards being completed, until the 9th of February; no objections has been made to the business in the letters of the 13th of January from the duke of Portland, of the 21 of February from the same, in another from Mr. Windham, in one of the 8th of February and on the 9th from Mr. Pitt. The last two were taken

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<sup>125</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 17 February, 1795

up with expostulation on the dismissal of Mr. B-----d, but not a single word on the catholic business.- On the 8th of February, indeed, the duke of Portland mentioned that affair- «touching at length on this important subject, and brining it for the first time, into play, as a question of an...»do not these extracts(from a publication which every Irishman ought to read) prove the crooked conduct of Mr. Pitt and his adherents- a conduct into which we should never have truly fathomed, had not an honest viceroy, laid them conscientiously before the public.<sup>126</sup>

I do not have the letter to the lord bishop Carlisle, but the tone of the script clearly indicates the opposition from within the Ascendency to catholic emancipation, an opposition that when successful obviously created grounds for radicalization within the groups promoting reform. In relation to the peasants this radicalization meant that they were now interesting parts of the political game to the republicans. If reform was not felt to be at hand after several promising decades the will to use armed force was perhaps a natural consequence, and to use this force with any hope of success the peasants formed a natural basis for their manpower.

The answer from the Lord Lieutenant further underlines the opposition on the part of the Irish parliament to countenance reform.

in this opinion (the relieving the Catholics from every remaining disqualification) the duke of Portland uniformly concurred with me; and when this question came under discussion, previous to my departure for Ireland, I found the cabinet with Mr. Pitt at their head, strongly impressed with the same convitio- Had I found it otherwise, I WOULD NEVER HAVE UNDERTAKEN THE GOVERNMENT(sic!).<sup>127</sup>

In relation to the subject matter; the reasons for peasant radicalization, the fact of the banishment of the pro-reform environments in Ireland and their radicalization weight heavily when one tries to define aspects of the peasant radicalization. The lord lieutenant Fitzwilliam was removed by the Irish administration after only a few weeks in power.

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<sup>126</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 17 February 1795

<sup>127</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 17 February 1795

To continue onwards in the year of 1795 the subject matter of the thesis compels me to show the differences in outlook between the Dublin Journal/ Freeman's Journal and the Dublin Evening Post. We have seen and interpreted the representation of Defender unrest in the Freeman's Journal and, as the description differs between the papers, an example from the Dublin Evening Post is prudent.

a misrepresentation of the facts having been inserted in the ministerial prints, relative to some disturbances which unhappily have taken place in the county Armagh, we deem it our duty to lay before our readers a true statement of the case so far as it has come to our knowledge.

About the middle of the week before last, there was a dance in the neighbourhood of Portadown, attended by a number of young fellows of all persuasions. After some time spent in drinking, a party of those miscreants called "Peep O'dayboys", finding themselves the most numerous, took in the head to pick a quarrel with the Catholics present, by ridiculing their religion in the most vulgar and pointed manner. An affray was the consequence; in this the Catholics were worsted. A second meeting took place the following day, which terminated nearly in the same manner; in consequence of which a general rising took place on both sides- the parties took positions on opposite hills, at a considerable distance, and kept up an unavailing fire at each other for two or three days, during which time no person was either killed or wounded, save a passenger, who in going past received a shot in his shoulder.

In the meantime measures were so concerted by the militia and sensibles in Armagh, Portadown, and that they contrived to draw the Catholics from their position, and surrounded fifty-six of them, who surrendered without making any resistance; the others of both parties fled at the approach of the military, and only two peep-of-day-boys were taken; those that were taken have been lodged in Armagh gaol. When disturbances prevailed in the very spot several years ago, some neighboring magistrates were charged with inciting the infatuated rabble to these acts of hostility. For political purposes!- and it is worthy to notice, than an officer of the Dublin militia, celebrated for his exertions, both as a printer, and orator, in planting the seeds of discord among Irishmen, holds a command at present in the neighbourhood. NORTHERN STAR.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 25 June, 1795

The tone in this rendition of events also relating to the sectarian unrest in the north of the country is reprinted from the Northern Star. It clearly states the antagonizers as the Peep O'day boys, and seems to feel that the response from the authorities were too harsh and unjust. The argument that at a previous incident the official response had been harsh based on politics rather than the bringing of order is indicative of the political views of the Dublin Evening Post.

The differences in covering such instances of unrest are clear, but what conclusions can be drawn from this in relation to the radicalization of the peasants? The answer should be somewhere in the middle between the differences in wording by the newspapers, but what we can reasonably conclude is that the Freeman's Journal seeks to enhance the imagery linking peasant unrest to both religion and republicanism. The Dublin Evening Post tries to lessen this link, oppose the Ascendency and promote ideas of equality in both legislative and judiciary matters.

A somewhat different letter is printed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September. It further enhances the aforementioned interpretation of the Dublin Evening Post, but sheds light on yet other facets of Irish society and the editorial profile of the newspaper.

Extracts of a letter from the county of Meath

In a letter published last week in a morning paper dated Athboy- it is there stated that a plot against many in this county was discovered, and that a number of respectable roman Catholics were accused as being principals in a plan for seizing on the property and taking away the lives of every protestant in this country.

«This story has gained considerable credit, more particularly among the prejudiced part of our neighbours- but as falsehood find friends among those only to whom it is grateful, the information is not intended for those, who with such unremitting virulence fabricate reports like these: it is to expose their malignant tendency, and in refusing such detestable falsehoods, do away in some degree the impression which those rumours in general, make on weak minds.

A drunken tailor in the above town, who had been a defender, was wheeled into a confession of his guilt by a sergeant of militia: this man after he had got sober, it is said, gave information against some persons concerned in the robbery of Mr. Murdoc, who were taken up, and upon further examination he confessed that it was the express intent of the defenders to rise in a mass upon the first promising opportunity, and seize upon the property of every person in the neighborhood without any religious distinction, and that those who gave the greatest opposition should experience the utmost severity.

This is the substance of the fellow's attestation sworn before a magistrate of this county, on which, however, little dependence can be placed, as he has accused one of sir B. Chapman's servants of a crime said to be committed at a time when his master can prove he was in his house.

The fact is- the peasantry has imbibed the spirit of insurrection, and think they are but for a short time to toil for their substance- they are grievously oppressed- and it is futile and vain to lay to the sword of religion this outrageous conduct. Those excesses were first set afloat by the wicked and dissolute- they are now continued and supported by the expectations held out to the needy;- and plausible promises procure friends to the cause on all sides.

The methods hitherto practiced have not been judiciously aimed at the radical mischief: -while hunger-cold-disease and wretchedness are placed on one hand, and the promise not only of subsistence but abundance on the other, it is but natural to hearken to what assuages anguish in its bitterest guise. Neither the horrors of confinement, banishment nor death have been ever found capable of suppressing the calls of hunger and the misery attendant of want.

The fundamental evil has produced progressive calamity these many years- it has its source from the manner in which land has been set up at auction- for the purchase of the produce of land must press heavier on the many than on the few- and hence the cottager toils for the luxury of the indolent- hence the want of an independent yeomanry as in England- and hence the accumulated distress of the Irish poor.<sup>129</sup>

The letter starts by talking about the accusations against "respectable Catholics" and continues to refute the allegations. The presentation of the reasons for the current unrest is laid squarely on the lack of opportunity and the poverty of the peasant populace, and it ridicules the idea that religion or radical republicanism is at its core. The political call for

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<sup>129</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 20 September, 1795

reform of the agricultural system is evident as the writer wants “an independent yeomanry as in England” to ease the poverty and pressure on the peasant community.

To this I have two comments. I have mentioned the nature of Irish farming and that it was more like the Russian system than the English one, but I have also mentioned the ambiguity in the sources when it comes to the relative poverty of the Irish peasant class. As such it is difficult to conclude beyond a shadow of a doubt that the peasants became radicalized as a result of social want exclusively.

Both the Freeman’s Journal and the Dublin Evening Post prints letters from people who does not see religion as the core issue of peasant radicalization. This strengthens the argument that religion was not seen as a defining force behind the peasant radicalization. Other than that the differences between the newspapers when it comes to describing peasant unrest does not show much common ground between them.

In the autumn of 1795 the earl of Howth proclaims his response to the unrest in his region of authority. This declaration is printed in the Dublin Evening Post and, if it follows the pattern of other similar declarations, would have been printed in most newspapers as a public notice. I choose to include parts of the declaration as it must be reasonable to assume that the sanctions set in place by this declaration says something about the perceived state of peasant unrest from the side of the authorities.

The earl of Howth in the chair.

whereas persons belonging to a traitorous banditti, styling themselves defenders, have lately infested part of this county and have endeavoured to persuade the lower classes, by intimidations and false hopes of plunder, to engage in treasonable oaths and conspiracies, in defiance of the lawes of their country, their allegiance to the king, and their duty to God. Now we the undersigned, being determined to resist and utterly suppress all such offences, think it incumbent on us to make the following declarations and resolutions;...”

“...and also where any of those persons styling themselves defenders may be assembled together, to carry their wicked purposes into execution, so as that they may be apprehended and brought to punishment, may depend upon receiving a reward of one hundred guineas, and that their names will be perfectly concealed.

. . . Resolved, that as every artifice and threat is made use of by the persons calling themselves defenders, to prevent innocent and well-intentioned persons from discovering their treasonable practices, and from giving their testimony in courts of justice, that we shall collectively and individually support, protect, and reward all such honest and well intentioned persons, who, sensible of their duty to their country, their king, and their God, shall discover the persons, or any of them, who are concerned in the aforesaid seditious and treasonable practices, and shall boldly stand forward in prosecution of the same...

. . . Resolved, that it be earnestly recommended to the lower classes of the people not to be out of their house at unseasonable hours of the night, as it is evident that those who by their occupation are obliged to work from an early hour in the morning through the whole of the day, ought, for the sake of necessary refreshment, to retire to rest at an early hour of the night, it is therefore hardly possible that men of such descriptions can be absent from their houses at an improper hour...<sup>130</sup>

What do these resolutions say of defender activity? It seems that the Defenders are engaging in racketeering, seditious oath-giving and common banditry. This is at least the way the Earl and his followers sees it. It is also evident that the practice of the Defenders to act by the cover of darkness warrants sanction in the form of a curfew, and that the Earl sees the farmers as the main body of which the Defenders consist. This declaration is the first attempt that I have noticed to curtail the peasant unrest on a local level. The gunpowder act and militia act may have had similar goals on a national level, but these declarations seem to have much in common with the act that marks the end of this inquiry.

To conclude the exploration of the sources we have the year 1796 left. In this year the riot act was implemented and Wolf Tone tried to invade Ireland with the aid of French forces. As such these facts makes it natural to end the studies of the reasons and motivations for peasant radicalization in 1796 as the radicalization and descent into open rebellion had manifested itself at this time.

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<sup>130</sup> The Dublin Evening Post, 24 October, 1795

## 1796

In 1796 the papers are obviously concerned with the increasing threat of a French invasion, and as in 1795 the continued labeling and identification of ones opponents seems to be the order of the day.

...That humane and exalted character, the attorney general, had officially before him unquestionable proof of the confederating of several apprentices, and binding themselves by horrid oaths, to the most atrocious acts of barbarity- youths, associating with clubs in low tippling-houses, to be initiated in deism, treason, and defenderism, under the abominable mark of erudition, at what they call their philanthropic societies...

...on the murder of two people...

...Horrid murder!...

...this is a further instance of the murderous purposes of defenderism, which seem to have no only bound its followers to the violation of every principle and vestige...<sup>131</sup>

This excerpt is included as it shows the link between societies and clubs and the Defenders. The Dublin Journal is of course not a reliable source in relation to such links, but with the knowledge of the increasing of republican clubs for the lower classes from 1795 onward it seems likely. To what extent these clubs were “Defender” clubs is difficult to know, but with the parochial nature of Irish society the idea of peasants meeting at night at the local tavern does not seem too farfetched. Whether these gatherings were of a seditious nature and whether they called themselves Defenders are difficult to say, but “their philanthropic societies” seem to indicate a link between a rural interest group and republican ideals (“to be initiated in deism, treason and defenderism”. This can be the politicized thoughts of the writer, the truth or a flat out lie, but it shows that it was a valid way of linking the problems of defenderism to the other unrest in the country at the time.

A somewhat humorous comment on the Northern Star’s rendition of a trial is found in the Dublin Journal on the 31th of December in 1796. The sentencing of these men to prison can

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<sup>131</sup> Dublin Journal, January 2, 1796



perhaps be viewed as the increased effort from the authorities to sanction behavior and gatherings that previously was allowed. As we saw in the declaration from the Earl of Louth toasts and oaths and assemblies were now punishable with jail.

A most audacious Libel has appeared in the northern star, a disaffected paper of Dublin- reflecting upon a magistrate of the county Antrim for having acted under the authority of an act of parliament, - in committing to prison nine persons who set the laws of their country at defiance.

It appears from the statement of these papers, that a magistrate of that country, EDMD. A, M'Naughten, Efq. had summoned a number of persons before him, to be examined upon their oath as to their knowledge of any unlawful Assemblies, or, of taking, or of tendering any unlawful Oaths in their respective neighbourhoods,. A Mr. Adam Boyd, a Mr. Slane, a Mr. W. Gilen, a Mr. J. Gillen, a Mr. S. Moore, a Mr. W. Moore, a Mr. M'llroy, a Mr. Jamelon, and a Mr. Somebody else,. (whos name is not legible in the paper before us) attended accordingly, but refused to answer the questions proposed to them; that is to say, they refused peremptorily to own whether they did or did not know of unlawful assemblies, or of the taking or tendering of unlawful oaths. - In consequence of their patriotic silence, they were committed to prison; and it is heartily to be regretted, that all the admirers of such true patriotism do not participate in the happiness of such a patriotic captivity. .

There is not, we believe, in the whole book of statutes, a clause more unequivocal than that upon the authority of which Mr. M'Naughten committed these men to Prison.<sup>132</sup>

The ridiculing tone of the letter when it speaks of the captives' "patriotic silence" goes to show the editorial profile of the Dublin Journal, and the full hearted support on the sentences given can be seen not only as a support for the authorities but also as a sarcastic poke at the Northern Star and its readers. It might also say something about how the defendants were regarded by the readers of the Journal.

The situation was quickly deteriorating as unrest blossomed and the French threatened to invade. That this fear was true and reasonable comes across in this letter.

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<sup>132</sup> Dublin Journal, 31 December, 1796

We (the hibernian journal) stop the press to insert the following extract of an authentic letter from capt. Hawkins of cork, and received this morning by mr. Martin, Smokealley.

Cork, 24th dec. 1796.

I would have done myself the pleasure of writing to you on my arrival here, but for want of a subject: I now acquaint you, we are here in an uproar; yesterday morning, a Mr. O`Sullivan, from Beerhaven, made affidavit at the mayor`s, that he saw 23 French line of battle ships, with several frigates and transports, close in with Bantry bay; that he was along-side of one of them, spoke to one of the officers, who told him, that the people on shore need not be afraid, that the came as friends, and not as enemies.- This morning I heard captain Mortorty, the regulating officer, say; that the kangaroo sloop of war, went through the French fleet, on the night of the 2tst infit. Proceeded to the eastward, landed an officer at the cove of Cork, and proceeded up channel.- this moment an express arrived. That the French fleet was advancing, if so, they can easily make a landing at Dunemark. There is nothing to obstruct the frigates and transports from going up the bay, as it is deep, broad and navigable for any ship of the line whatsoever. Dunemark is about a mile from Bantry, and from thence an excellent road to cork, distance only 40 Irish miles.- This is all at present I can inform you of on that subject.<sup>133</sup>

The attempted French invasion on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December can be said to have been based on the French`s understanding of the conditions in Ireland. Their alliance with Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, and Wolf Tone`s insistence on the frailty of English rule in Ireland made the French decide to act. The forces did not land, but the fact that they tries shows that they believed that it had a chance to be successful and this thesis chooses their assessment on the conditions of Irish society to say that at the end of 1796 the country was radicalized.

One of the reasons that have been seen as a contributing factor to the French decision to invade was the Convention act or Militia act. This was an act that enabled the authorities to act with force against any uprising and that was meant to contain unrest by striking it down as quickly and forcefully as possible.

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<sup>133</sup> Dublin Evening Post, 31 December, 1796

AN ACT TO PREVENT TUMULTUOUS RISINGS OF PERSONS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES THEREIN  
MENTIONED:--SECT.22.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that all and every justice of the peace of this kingdom shall have full power and authority to summon any person or persons within his jurisdiction, whom he shall have cause to suspect to be capable of giving material evidence concerning any offence or offences committed against this act, and to examine him, her, or them relative thereto on his, her or their oath or oaths, concerning any of offences aforesaid, and, if he shall see cause to bind such person or persons in recognizance to appear and prosecute at the next affizes, and in case such person or persons, who shall be summoned for that purpose, shall refuse to submit to such examination it shall and may be lawful to and for such justice of the peace to comm...<sup>134</sup>

With this excerpt from the riot act it seems clear that the radicalization of the peasant populace and most other people in Ireland was a fact, and the sources chosen bring us no closer than this to the fact of the motivations and reasons for peasant radicalization. The necessity behind passing an act to deal with ‘tumultuous risings’ shows that the authorities felt that the unrest in the country had gone too far and that they needed stronger methods of sanction to deal with the unrest across the country. This concludes the examination of the newspapers and the summarization of the findings and the answer to the research question is all that remains.

## Summary

The perhaps most striking feature of the newspapers are the difference in editorial profile. This has been covered, but the methodical problems in discovering truths about the peasant radicalization should be discussed. The Dublin Evening Post, the most circulated and popular of the papers is the paper with the least mention of the Defenders. This could mean several things, but through my reading the view that they had to remain neutral and that they faced the possibility of severe official sanction seems to be the most plausible. They, in other words, refused to partake in the general condemnation and lack of analysis presented in the Freeman’s Journal. This does not entail that the Freeman’s Journal’s rendition of events are to be believed without question as they would strive to remain in the good graces of the

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<sup>134</sup> Dublin Evening Post, 31 December, 1796

authorities as well. It does point to the view that the authorities were interested in labeling the Defenders as an almost “terrorist organization”.

The aspect of why the difference is so big in what news is chosen to print could partly be because of the editors themselves, their political views and the readers they hoped to reach. The Dublin Journal is the most vocal in its condemnation of the peasant unrest, and also the one paper that presents the clearest link between religion and the unrest. This is interesting as the Journal is read by folk of contrary political views and could possibly be perceived by the more ‘republican’ elements as a useful tool in presenting the opposition as bigoted and archaic. We have identified three main forces in Irish politics at the time; Dublin castle, the Protestant Ascendency and those wanting reform, within or without parliamentary means. The debate in the newspapers clearly confirms these three forces. The relative freedom of the press is also an interesting aspect, as people generally are allowed and able to defend themselves against allegations, and even present their case of wanting recompense for actions that strictly speaking almost illegal. (The printer wanting reimbursement from the United Irishmen). The only factor not talked too much about in the papers are the most blatant republican thoughts as these were subject to harsh punishments and imprisonment by the government. I do not see this is too big of a problem as the republican sentiment of the day is evident in the sources either way. In fact, one of the main problems in examining the 1790s in Ireland is the wealth of research that has been awarded to the republican ideals and groups making it challenging to get a clear view of the other aspects of society and reasons for radicalization.

Whether the sources shed any light on the hidden transcripts of the peasant populace is hard to judge. As I have said, the ‘hidden’ aspects of the sources can perhaps be gleamed in the selection of articles chosen by the editors, but as none of the sources are talking directly to the peasants it is difficult to over-emphasize the degree of insight into peasant realities that the sources offer. The state of the press was not totally free, so the implementation of Scott’s method was valid, but in my view the editorial profiles say more about the different forces of power in Irish society than the disenfranchised class of the peasants.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

To reach a definite conclusion to the questions of motivations and reasons behind peasant radicalization following the Catholic relief-act in 1793 based on my sources is not possible. However, the newspapers and the other sources examined have given plenty of hints and discoveries concerning the research question, and in this chapter I will summarize my findings and present my conclusion, as far as it is possible based on the sources. I will do this by summarizing my findings in each of the three avenues of examination that I presented in chapter 1: religion, the Enlightenment and social want and then tentatively conclude on the reasons and motivations behind the continued peasant radicalization following the Catholic relief-act of 1793.

### Religion

In the eighteenth century religion was hugely important in Ireland. However, this does not mean that I have found any strong indication that religion played an dominant part of peasant radicalization directly. The Church and most priests discouraged violent opposition to the Penal laws. The Church had to be careful not to alienate their ‘flock’ by using too intrusive preaching and collecting too much in offerings. This made the Church less able to enforce the firm social control which the Church was able to in other parts of Europe. The Church was dependent on the goodwill of the peasants when it came to hiding priests and supporting them. This could possibly have created a very strong link between the Catholic religion and the peasant communities. The Church was subject to the same legislative oppression as the peasants were, and the participation in religious activities was a strong identity marker and a good example of silent opposition. There was an obvious link in contemporary realities and debate between the Catholic religion and the peasants. Edmund Burke claims that their religion made them loyal servants of the crown, and that the anti-Catholic legislation should be repealed. Others, like Dr. Duigenan, feels that the reintegration of Catholics in the higher echelons of society would be the end of the established Church and that the peasantry would rise and attack the members of the Ascendancy. The newspapers tend to disregard the religious elements of peasant radicalization, and the most blatant anti-popery rhetoric is not to be found in the newspapers I have examined. When the religious elements are discussed, it is primarily to point out the folly in labeling the unrest as religiously motivated. The most

important that I have found is the extremely political elements in religious debates. This is not strange as the Penal laws were directly targeting Catholics, and they were defined as such not only by whom or in what way they worshiped on Sundays, but also as a political entity. To be a Catholic was much more than what you believed. Even though the implementation of the Penal laws was incomplete, and even though the repeal movement took shape as the century wore on, the Catholics were a disenfranchised class that was identify as much by their political status as their religious persuasion.

## Enlightenment

The effect of the Enlightenment on the peasant population is mostly an indirect one. I have shown the sentiment of Enlightenment in the process of relief by Edmund Burke and other parliamentarians, and Paine's 'The rights of Man' was a bestseller in Ireland at the time. Changes in policy driven forth by new ideas of equality and against religious persecution would have had favorable effects on the life of an average peasant, but the relief efforts did not address the inherently unjust system of tenancy and the discrepancy between the Catholic majority's holdings and those of the representatives of the Ascendancy. The link between the peasants/Defenders and the United Irishmen is a proven fact by the Defenders participating in the 1798 rebellion, but the fact that not all peasants rose as one, and that many opposed the atheism and republicanism of the United Irishmen, seems to suggest that Enlightenment was not the main factor in the peasant's radicalization. The level of Enlightenment thought that would have trickled down to the peasant's consciousness is impossible to determine, but even when thoughts of equality and against injustice is presented to a peasant in Ireland during the latter stages of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is not a obvious conclusion that he will relate these thoughts to anything more than his own life and grievances against his local landlord. The newspapers are extremely interested in the French revolution and in the public sphere the radical ideas of the revolution must have had a prominent place in contemporary debate. The Castle newspapers tend to attack the ideals of reformists in Ireland by linking them up with the ideals of the French revolution. They also try to claim that the peasant unrest is grounded in the same sphere of thought as that of the French revolution, and that the consequences of continued unrest in Ireland could be just as catastrophic for the government as was the case in France. This notion is ridiculed in the Dublin Evening Post which at multiple occasions criticizes the view that every disgruntled group in Ireland is about to find common ground in the republican ideals and revolt.

## Social want

The tale of the impoverished Irish peasant is not easy to support without reservations. In chapter 4, I have shown that the peasants were poor, but that they for the most part were not much worse off than many contemporary peasants in other European countries. They had relatively easy access to cheap fuel and nourishing food. This does not mean that their lives were easy.. They had very little money, limited possibility for social advancement and had few rights concerning property and tenancy. In the newspapers, the peasants' lives are not talked about to any great extent, but their position is mentioned. They are presented as rabble when talked about in relation to unrest or attacks on local authorities, and the term 'banditti' is often used. There are also examples of writers being baffled at the notion that social want should be the reason for radicalization as they see a prosperous countryside. The fact of the matter is that the peasants probably had the means to sustain themselves, but that they were totally dependent to the leniency and character of their landlord. They had to a large extent no power over their own existence as both their legal rights concerning tenancy due to the Penal laws, and the famine of 1800-01 shows. They lived on the edge in a country on the verge of being overpopulated.

The Irish language and the Gaelic culture were under considerable pressure both from lack of schooling open to the Irish Catholics and the end of Irish as an official language in more and more sectors of public life, but some things seems to have survived. The Báile, or village, was a natural gathering point for the peasants as most of them lived in relative proximity to it. The newspapers mention dances, ale-houses and pamphlets in relation to the rural areas of Ireland to such an extent that the central importance of such places seems likely. This must have created a sense of community both by the shared language and their common destiny as members of an oppressed class.

Much of the Defender unrest that is mentioned is small scale attacks on magistrates or members of the local authorities. That this was a problem in parts of the country can be gauged by looking to the governmental response to the unrest. The implementation of curfews is a sanction the local authorities used, and in one article the implication that honest farmers would sleep during the night as the nature of their work required them to get up early in the morning, was thinly veiled sarcasm.

## Summary

Summing up my examination the conclusion must be that the reasons and motivations for the peasant radicalization following the relief-act of 1793 are many-faceted. I have shown that it is reasonable to assume that based on the local nature of the country, the reasons and motivations for radicalization among the peasants could be different from area to area. The fact that the North is where we find most evidence for Sectarian unrest can probably be explained by the presence of Protestant settlers and the fight over land. The Defender connection to the republican ideals of the United Irishmen can possibly be explained by those Defenders' proximity to Dublin or Belfast. On the whole, the only common denominator I have found both through my examination of the primary and secondary sources are the ever present poverty, oppression and restrictions on the Irish peasant's ability to partake in the governing of their own lives. Catholicism can be used as a motivation for radicalization when your participation in religious activities is against the law, and when you are losing out on legal right as a result of your religion. It can also be a motivation as a mark of your identity, and as such becoming more a consequence of oppression than a radicalizing element in itself. The Enlightenment might very well have been instrumental to many peasants with its ideas of social justice and equality, but to what degree those ideals and thoughts were important is difficult to say. The peasants were to a large extent excluded from the public debate and the abstract solutions on social injustice.

The peasant radicalization was often talked about in the newspapers, but more so in the two 'loyalist' ones. It is possible to argue that the editorial choices in what to print constitutes hidden transcripts as they seem to try to create and define the reality behind the reasons for the peasant radicalization and general unrest in Irish society as a whole. By this they aimed to impact the public response to the radicalization. With this in mind the examination of the newspapers has been very fruitful, and has shown that the editors and writers use the issue of peasant radicalization to promote their own view on what they would like to happen in Ireland. Some things, like the fact that religion is disregarded in an article both in the Freeman's Journal and the Dublin Evening Post can be taken as an argument for that at least in contemporary debate, religion was not seen as important other than to the few debaters that still tried to cling to the remnants of anti-popery and archaic notions of Catholicism.



It is difficult with any great amount of certainty to discern the reasons and motivations for the peasant radicalization. But the evidence points toward an understanding that the peasants chose their local grievances and social issues rather than that they as a unit gave their support to either the republican ideals of the United Irishmen or sectarian revolt. Even if I cannot point out which of the three avenues I have examined is the most important in the minds of the peasants, the evidence strongly suggests, that the combination of the three avenues of examination creates the ground for radicalization. One thing is the timing of it all, one could not overlook and disregard the time and the impact the French revolution had on Irish society, even down to its lowest members. Another thing is the apparent problem presented in the research question: Why would the peasants continue to radicalize when the relief effort was underway? It is widely agreed that the reforms did not happen quickly enough for parts of the republican movement, and in the case of the peasants the lessening in oppressing legislation had limited impact on their day to day life. The clamor for reform and the inherently unfair system restricting the Irish peasants to a life of poverty, would point to a continued radicalization motivated by the oppression of them as Catholics, the impoverished state of their class, the trickledown effect of notions on the rights of man, and the peasants' identity as representatives of the indigenous people of Ireland.

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